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Baker-Polito Administration Warns Public of the Dangers of Thin Ice

BOSTON, MA – With recent unseasonably warm weather conditions occurring throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, today the Baker-Polito Administration is asking the public to remain conscious of the risks associated with thin ice. The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), the Massachusetts State Police (MSP), the Department of Fire Services (DFS), and the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) are warning the public of the potential dangers of thin ice on the state’s many lakes, ponds, streams, and rivers.

“Ice can be deceiving because it freezes and thaws at different rates and ice thickness can vary depending on currents, springs, depth, and debris in the water,” **said MEMA Director Kurt Schwartz.** “Residents should skate on bodies of water only after there has been a prolonged freeze and steps have been taken to ensure the ice is sufficiently thick. Always remember, ‘when in doubt, don’t go out’ on the ice.”

“Throughout Massachusetts residents will find excellent outdoor recreational opportunities for the whole family to enjoy; however, it is incredibly important that we all remain fully aware of our surroundings, particularly during the winter months, to ensure everyone remains safe,” **said DCR Commissioner Leo Roy.** “Falling through thin ice can very quickly become a tragedy, which is why we all must be diligent during this time of year.”

The winter months offer many unique opportunities for the general public to explore and enjoy nature, such as ice fishing, ice skating, and snowmobiling. Unfortunately, every year state and local officials receive and respond to reports of individuals falling through thin ice. An individual who falls into icy waters can quickly experience hypothermia, which can become deadly if not treated immediately. Hypothermia symptoms include shivering, dizziness, hunger, nausea, accelerated breathing, difficulty speaking, lack of coordination, fatigue, and an increase in heart rate.

“The most important thing to remember when someone or a pet falls through the ice, is don’t become a victim yourself,” **said State Fire Marshal Peter J. Ostroskey.** “Call 9-1-1 first to get help on the way; then reach with something long or throw something to help them before firefighters arrive.”

Below are several ice safety tips everyone should follow when near bodies of water during the winter months:

- Parents should always closely watch and supervise their children.
- Never go onto ice alone.
- Always keep your pets on a leash (if a pet falls through the ice, do not attempt a rescue - - call for help).
- Beware of ice covered with snow. Snow can insulate ice and keep it from freezing. It can also hide cracks as well as other weak spots.
- Ice formed over flowing water (including springs under the surface) is generally weaker than ice over still water.
- Ice seldom freezes or thaws at a uniform rate. It can be a foot thick in one spot and an inch thick in another.
- If a companion falls through the ice and you are unable to reach that person from shore, throw something to him or her (a rope, tree branch, even jumper cables from a car, etc.). If this does not work, go or phone for help. Get medical assistance for the victim immediately.
- If you fall in, try not to panic. Turn toward the direction you came from, and place your hands and arms on the unbroken surface, working forward by kicking your feet. Once the ice is solid enough to hold you, and you can pull yourself out, remain lying on the ice (do not stand; lying down spreads your weight across a wider area, lessening your weight on any one spot) and roll away from the hole. Crawl back the way you came, keeping your weight distributed, until you return to solid ice or ground.
- As the season progresses, plan accordingly and use caution, as the conditions of older ice greatly varies and is subject to rapid changes.

For further information regarding ice and winter safety tips, please visit the [MEMA](#) and [DFS](#) websites. The Massachusetts State Police remind individuals to call 911 in the event of an emergency, such as an individual falling through the ice. Additionally, several state parks and facilities provide outdoor recreational opportunities throughout the winter season, some of which have DCR rangers and/or staff facilitating many programs. Please visit the DCR's [website](#) for details.