



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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A Reminder to Stay Safe While Snowmobiling

SENATOR PATTY RITCHIE January 17, 2019

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Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

Every year, countless people take to our state's more than 10,000 miles of snowmobile trails to enjoy this winter pastime. Not only is it a lot of fun—it helps support our economy too, as the sport is responsible for an economic impact of \$868 million annually.

However, it is important that as you enjoy your time on the trails, you do so safely. Far too often, we hear of accidents where snowmobilers are severely injured, or tragically lose their lives. According to a recent report by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and

Historic Preservation, in total, there were 183 accidents during the 2016-17 snowmobile season, resulting in 24 fatalities.

To prevent accidents from occurring, I encourage you to follow the below safety guidelines:

- ***Complete a safety course:*** All riders, and especially young people, should complete a New York State Snowmobile Safety Course to learn how to safely, and legally operate a snowmobile. For a schedule of upcoming courses, visit www.parks.ny.gov.
- ***Check the weather forecast and trail conditions:*** Living in Central and Northern New York, we know how quickly winter weather can change. Because conditions can change dramatically in a very short period, you always need to be prepared for the unexpected while snowmobiling. If conditions look like they will be especially poor, wait for a better day to ride.
- ***Carry an emergency kit:*** It is always a good idea to bring along an emergency kit when hitting the trails. It should include first aid necessities, a flashlight, compass, blanket, water, snacks and other items to help you survive if you find yourself stranded.
- ***Avoid alcohol:*** Just as it is dangerous to drink and drive an automobile, it is extremely hazardous to drink and drive a snowmobile. Never drink alcohol before, or while driving a snowmobile.

- ***Stay on designated trails:*** Marked trails have been groomed and are less likely to be hazardous. Avoid going off trail and steer clear of bodies of water, as drowning is one of the leading causes of snowmobile fatalities. Even if a waterway appears to be frozen, ice can often times easily crack underneath the weight of your snowmobile. Be sure to check local ice conditions, carry—or wear—a flotation device and follow the old adage, “If you don’t know, don’t go.”
- ***Maintain safe speeds:*** Obey posted speed limits on the trails and at all times, travel at a moderate pace that will provide you with enough time to react to something unexpected on the trail. Be sure to take extra care at night so as not to “outride” your headlights. To avoid doing so and to illuminate any hazards that might be in your path, it is a good idea to keep speeds below 45 miles-per-hour during darkness.

When done safely and responsibly, snowmobiling can be be great fun in the winter. If you plan to hit the trails in the coming months, I hope you follow the above tips to stay safe while doing so.