THE RED CROSS ANSWERS THE MOST COMMON ICE SAFETY QUESTIONS:

Q: WHAT IS THE SAFEST ICE SURFACE TO USE?

A: The safest ice to use is ice that doesn't have any water underneath! Indoor and outdoor skating rinks and homemade backyard skating areas offer plenty of opportunity for recreation *without* the threat of falling through the ice and into cold water.

Q: WHEN CHOOSING ICE COVERED WATER FOR MY ACTIVITY, WHAT SHOULD I CONSIDER?

A: At least a week of consistent, below 0 degrees Celsius temperatures are necessary before the ice is ready for safe testing. Salt water freezes at a lower temperature than fresh water so it will take longer for it to freeze.

Ice forms earlier on small ponds and lakes and slow moving streams.

- **Clear blue ice** is the **strongest**;
- **White or opaque ice** contains air and is **half as strong** as blue ice; and
- **Grey or dark ice** indicates the presence of water and is **extremely dangerous.**

Remember: The colour of the ice can be an *indication* of its strength; however it always still needs to be tested!!

Wind, tides, currents, and even chemicals affect the formation and strength of the ice - in fact, where there are strong currents, ice may not form at all. Be wary of locations where brooks, streams and rivers flow into a larger body of water. These areas remain unsafe throughout the winter.

Q: HOW THICK SHOULD THE ICE BE?

A: The Canadian Red Cross recommends that the ice be a safe, uniform thickness for your planned activity. The "safety zone" is:

15 cm (6 inches) for small groups to skate or walk on
20 cm (8 inches) for large groups such as skating parties
25 cm (10 inches) for snowmobiles, all terrain vehicles

Q: HOW CAN I FIND OUT HOW THICK THE ICE IS?

A: *Some* recreation departments measure the ice thickness in their communities; additionally local RCMP and fire departments may also provide information about ice conditions.

Q: HOW DO I TEST THE ICE WHEN ICE THICKNESS REPORTS ARE NOT AVAILABLE IN MY COMMUNITY?

A: It takes *two* people to **safely** test the ice. The 1st person - *the tester* - wears a PFD or Lifejacket and chops or drills a small hole in the ice near the shoreline. If the ice measurement is within the "safety zone" the tester moves out about 30m (100ft), chops or drills another hole, and takes a measurement. The 2nd person - *the supporter* - carries a

reaching assist (torpedo buoy with a line, long pole, etc), and follows the tester while remaining at a safe distance, ready to assist if the tester falls through. All test holes should be clearly marked, and the measured "safe area" should be identified. New test holes should be cut for each new adventure out onto the ice, especially when the ice is just forming.

Q: HOW OFTEN SHOULD THE ICE THICKNESS BE CHECKED?

A: Check ice thickness each time you plan to go out on the ice. Weather conditions and temperatures affect the thickness and stability of the ice. Once ice has reached a safe thickness and the temperatures consistently remain between -5 and -15 degrees Celsius, ice can be measured on a weekly basis. Remember, measuring thickness is the only safe method of ensuring the ice is thick enough for activity.

Q: WHAT ELSE SHOULD BE DONE TO PREPARE FOR ICE ACTIVITIES?

A: Always plan to go with a friend. Children should be supervised by an adult. Ensure rescue equipment is available, such as: a lifejacket, reaching pole, rope, ladder, and a first aid kit. Dressing warmly is vital in cold weather; being sure to wear a hat, scarf and mitts is a key element in the prevention of frostbite and hypothermia. Helmets are encouraged for young children who are more susceptible to falling when they are just learning to skate. Also, wearing a PFD, such as a floater suit or lifejacket, is a lifesaving precaution when planning excursions involving crossing the ice.

Q: WHAT ARE SOME TIPS TO HELP ME STAY SAFE ONCE I'M ON THE ICE?

A: Always stay with a friend and have adult supervision- someone needs to help if there is trouble. Stay within the area that has been measured off for safety and be aware that ice thickness *may* vary, so keep your eyes and ears tuned to changes in the ice conditions, such as weak spots, dark patches, water, and cracks.

Q: WHAT ARE SOME SAFETY TIPS FOR SNOWMOBILERS?

A: While Red Cross recommends snowmobiles remain on land, it is recognized that there are times when use of ice surface is unavoidable. At least 25 cm of thickness is required to support the weight of a snowmobile. Also, due to the speed of snowmobiles, drivers don't have much time to spot danger and to react to dangerous conditions, which is why preparation is so important. Plan to go with another person and let someone at home know where you are going, and when you expect to return. Wear a PFD or Lifejacket, and carry rescue equipment such as a torpedo buoy and rope. When travelling on the ice, snowmobiles should be a safe distance apart, so that others can stop and assist if the lead vehicle falls through. Always travel near the shoreline, and *never* across the middle of a lake.

Q: HOW CAN I HELP SOMEONE WHO HAS FALLEN THROUGH THE ICE?

A: Always ensure your own safety FIRST when helping someone else in an emergency situation, if the scene isn't safe you could end up adding yourself to the list of victims, and then two rescues would be required instead of just one.

First, try calling out the steps for self rescue, they may be able to help themselves. Next, try to reach to rescue from shore, if that isn't possible then you will have to go out onto the ice to help them. Lie down on the ice and *extend your reach* with a reaching assist - a torpedo buoy and rope, PFD or lifejacket, ladder, pole, hockey stick, or *anything* - tell the person to grab on and kick their feet, while you do the pulling. Roll or crawl to safety. (Self-rescue is easier if you are wearing a PFD!)

Q: WHAT CAN I DO IF I FALL THROUGH THE ICE?

A: Don't panic, it's important that you are able to stay calm in order to think about what you need to do to get out as soon as possible. Yell for help, and try to yell what's happened to you (e.g. "Help me, I've fallen through the ice"). Next you should reach out with your arms and break the weak ice in front of you. Grab as far up on the ice as you can and start kicking your feet so your body becomes horizontal. Pull and kick until you are flat on the ice and always roll or crawl to safety.

Q: WHAT SHOULD PARENTS DO TO ENSURE THEIR CHILD'S SAFETY AROUND THE ICE?

A: Ice poses a real threat to young children who may venture onto the ice out of curiosity. Parents should discuss ice safety with their children, and supervise their children during ice-related activities. Also, protective barriers (such as fencing) should be erected in areas near home and play areas, such as backyard ponds and brooks, to keep curious children away from dangerous ice conditions. Furthermore, parents should talk about these issues with their children and educate them on what to do if something bad does happen. The emphasis should be on three main things: preparing for winter and ice activities, staying safe on the ice, and surviving in emergency situations. These tips are put in place to prevent unfortunate incidents on the ice.

Q: WHAT CAN I DO TO MAKE MY COMMUNITY ICE SAFE?

A: Organize a community WINTER SAFETY COMMITTEE (police, fire, recreation and health departments, RCMP, parents, Water Safety Instructors, teachers, etc.) to identify local winter hazard areas. The committee can develop strategies to ensure the community is made aware of these local hazards, and to work towards reducing or eliminating the hazards. Organizing a community ice testing and reporting service is a convenient way to ensure appropriate ice thickness every time you go out onto the ice. A "neighbourhood ice watch" program where parents take turns supervising skaters after school and on weekends can make it easier to avoid ice emergencies. Additionally, delivering "ice safety" presentations to your local school or community group can provide a good resource to the children.