

Let's Go Snow Machining!

It's wintertime and that means time for winter fun. Like other outdoor winter activities, snow machining is a popular way for family and friends to enjoy the great outdoors. The days are already growing longer and plenty of snow makes for great conditions for snow machining. Thousands of people in the Homer area and throughout Alaska will spend the next few months enjoying snow machines, and safety is vital to enjoying the sport to its fullest.

In Alaska, snow machine injuries hospitalize between 40 and 50 youth (age 0-19) per year, and off-road vehicles (snow machines and ATVs) are the third leading cause of injury hospitalization for the 10-19 age group. Snow machine injuries often occur when the snow machine collides with an object or another vehicle, or when the rider is ejected. Another common cause of injuries is falling out of a sled being towed by a snow machine. A helmet observational study conducted from January to April 2001 in rural and urban areas of Alaska showed that helmet use among children and adolescents was higher than among adults (teens 61%, children 54%, adults 38%).

Join in the International Snowmobile Safety Week, January 13-19, to promote safe riding and responsible attitudes and actions that foster the safe, family image of riding with the following guidelines:

- Snow machines and alcohol don't mix, so don't drink and ride
- Know before you go ... always check ice and snow conditions
- When night riding, slow down and expect the unexpected
- Ride safe, stay on the trail, and respect private property
- Know the risks and be prepared
- Cross with care and don't become road-kill
- Wear and pack appropriate gear ... helmets, goggles, back-up parts and survival gear
- Make it a family affair ... take the kids and neighbors
- Ride smart, ride right, and stay in control
- One is a lonely number, so never ride alone
- Promote your right to ride and get involved
- Smart riders are safe riders who take snow machine safety training

Kids can learn to respect the need for safety if they see the adults in their family and riding group making safety a number one priority. Get your family or riders together before your next ride and take the Safe Riders Pledge:

- I will never drink and drive a snow machine
- I will drive within the limits of my machine and my own abilities
- I will obey the rules and laws of Alaska or wherever I am riding
- I will be careful when crossing roads, and always cross at a right angle to traffic
- I will keep my machine in top shape and follow a pre-op check before each ride
- I will wear appropriate clothing, including gloves, boots and a helmet with visor

Riders can learn more by visiting the International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association website and downloading the safe rider's manual. For local snow machine information, trails and rides, contact the local Snowmads snow machine club at 235-0771 or on their website at homersnomads.org.

Sources: International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association and the State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services.