

Snowmobile clubs prepare for safe season

Most snowmobile clubs in southern Ontario are yet to hit the trails this year, but they are encouraging their members to take part in the sport in a safe manner.

There hasn't been enough snow fall yet this year to get the trails groomed and ready so snowmobilers are still waiting for good dumping of the white stuff so they can get out and have some fun.

The Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs is encouraging its members to "make smart choices, ride with care and control."

International Snowmobile Safety Week is observed from January 15 to 23, and highlights the importance of safe practices on the trails.

"Safe trail riding is always a top priority for the OFSC," said Ryan Eickmeier, OFSC CEO. "But it's even more important for every snowmobiler to take our common-sense message to heart this winter as we welcome so many new riders to our trails."

The OFSC operates around 30,000 km of trails in the province. It is one of the world's largest recreational trail systems totalling almost twice as many kilometres as Ontario's provincial highway network.

Trails are groomed and kept clear. They are statistically the safest place to ride a snowmobile. However, snowmobiling does come with an inherent risk, so riders must always be prepared for the unexpected by making smart choices and operating their sleds with care and control.

Snowmobilers should always remain on a marked trail. Wandering off any trail surface into unbroken snow, unfamiliar terrain or farmer's fields can not only be risky for the rider, it may also compromise the safety of landowners or their property.

The OFSC Driver Training course is the snowmobile safety course authorized by the Ministry of Transportation Ontario. It teaches new snowmobilers the skills and habits necessary to be safe and courteous trail riders.

Trail riders should always choose the right safety gear. This includes a properly fitted, fastened and approved snowmobile helmet and brightly coloured weather proof outerwear with reflective materials that are purpose-made for snowmobiling.

There is a full check list of responsibilities for snowmobilers on the trails.

These include riding within your abilities and comfort level, always ride with a companion, riding in single file, and checking weather conditions before you ride.

Once enough snow is on the trailers, local riders will be out and having fun.

Following safety protocols will ensure you have a good riding season.

By Brian Lockhart Local Journalism Initiative Reporter