

**Wisconsin
Department of Natural Resources
2001-2002 Snowmobile
Enforcement & Safety Report**



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**2001-2002 Snowmobile Program Report
Summary**

The 2001-2002 Snowmobile Program Report was compiled from the 15 fatal investigations and other data collected during the fiscal year 2001-2002 (a fiscal year runs from July 1 – June 30).

Conservation Wardens investigate all fatal snowmobile incidents and as such, Wisconsin law requires that a conservation warden or law enforcement officer be notified immediately of any snowmobile incident that results in an injury requiring medical treatment by a physician. In addition, the operator(s) involved in these reportable incidents must file a written report with the Department of Natural Resources within 10 days, insofar as they are capable of doing so.

FATAL INCIDENT CAUSES

The primary type of crash causing the victim's death continues to be striking a fixed object such as trees or fixed objects. The secondary type of crash leading to the victim's death this reporting period was water related. The leading contributing factors were excessive speed, with alcohol consumption and poor ice conditions following.

There were 7 (11 the previous year) fatal crashes that investigators directly identified speed as a contributing factor to the death of the operator/passenger. Of the 7 speed related fatalities, 4 of those who died had consumed alcohol or 57% (63% the previous year) of the speed related victims.

Alcohol was identified as another major contributing factor. The law expressly states a person is under the influence of alcohol once their blood alcohol level reaches 0.10; however, for the purposes of this report, any alcohol level identified in the coroner's report (by percent) is considered to be a contributing factor.

Forty-seven percent (7 of the victims) of the known toxicology reports performed show alcohol was consumed by the victim. Toxicology examinations were not performed on three victims. Four victims had no alcohol present and one victim was reported having a trace amount of alcohol in his body. A review of the alcohol involved fatalities show that no victims had a less than 0.10 alcohol levels. Fifty-seven percent of the victims that consumed alcohol show levels from 0.10 to 0.19%. The other forty-three percent of the alcohol related victims were reported at 0.20 or above, with one victim result at 0.33%

WHO WAS INVOLVED

Thirteen of the victims were male. Victim ages ranged from 14-74 years, with the average age, 38.9 years; last season's average age was 31.5 years. The largest percentage of victims was age 40-49 years. This statistic changed dramatically from last season's 21-29 age group, which made up the largest percentage of victims. The second largest age group was age 21-29 years. One child under 16 was killed this reporting period. Of the 15 fatal incidents, 13 of the victims were Wisconsin residents while 2 were from Illinois. The majority of the victims (13) had not received Wisconsin Snowmobile Safety Training. Of the 15 victims, 12 were known to have been wearing a helmet, 2 were not wearing a helmet and 1 was unknown.

WHEN DO THE FATAL INCIDENTS OCCUR

A correlation was observed by reviewing fatality statistics for the past ten years. Inferences can be drawn as to the time of day and the day of the week that fatal incidents are most likely to occur. Statistics show the majority of the snowmobilers were fatally injured on Friday, Saturday or Sunday. Saturdays show a higher number of victims over any other day. The time of day/night that snowmobilers are most likely to be involved in a deadly incident is between the hours of 7:00 pm - 3:00 am.

FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED

The statewide 2001-2002 snowmobile season began late. The first snowfall of the year held more promise than actual results when twelve to fourteen inches of snow fell in the northern areas late November. The first snow accumulations quickly melted due to unseasonably warm temperatures. As a result, Wisconsin did not actually see more normal cold temperatures until late December. The southern portion the state did not see any measurable snowfall until December 24, even then area lakes stayed open with only small ponds and side channels freezing over with a thin layer of ice. Overall, the state suffered a severe lack of snowfall the entire season; however, sufficient amounts of snow did accumulate in the northern areas late February and stayed until the end of the season (March).

One change from the previous year was an emergency nighttime speed limit was no longer in effect. The previous season, 2000-01 was the first time a statewide speed limit restricting night speeds to 50-mph or less was in used.

Anecdotal reports from snowmobilers claimed an unstable global economy affected local markets and may have had impacts on snowmobile purchases, tourism and the over-all desire to recreate.

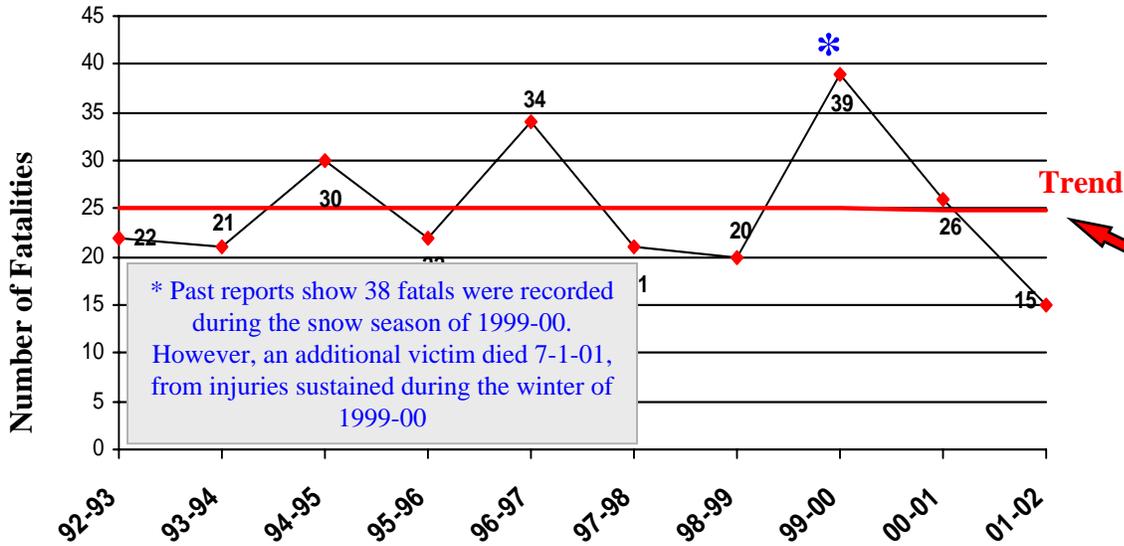
The Governor's budget bill (September 2001) converted two existing warden positions within the department to the snowmobile program. This conversion yielded an additional 3,700 hours for snowmobile enforcement, safety education, court, maintenance and administrative duties.

National attitudes show that alcohol use while snowmobiling is becoming less and less acceptable. This claim is confirmed by the American Council of Snowmobile Associations' recent adoption of a zero tolerance stance.

Wisconsin has been tracking alcohol involved fatals for many years with traditional results showing alcohol as a contributing factor in about 75% of the deaths. A more recent snapshot of this trend shows a different picture. The trend for the past four years is detailed in the chart below.

Alcohol Involved Fatal Incidents			
1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02
75%	66%	46%	47%
Involved	Involved	Involved	Involved

History of Snowmobile Fatalities

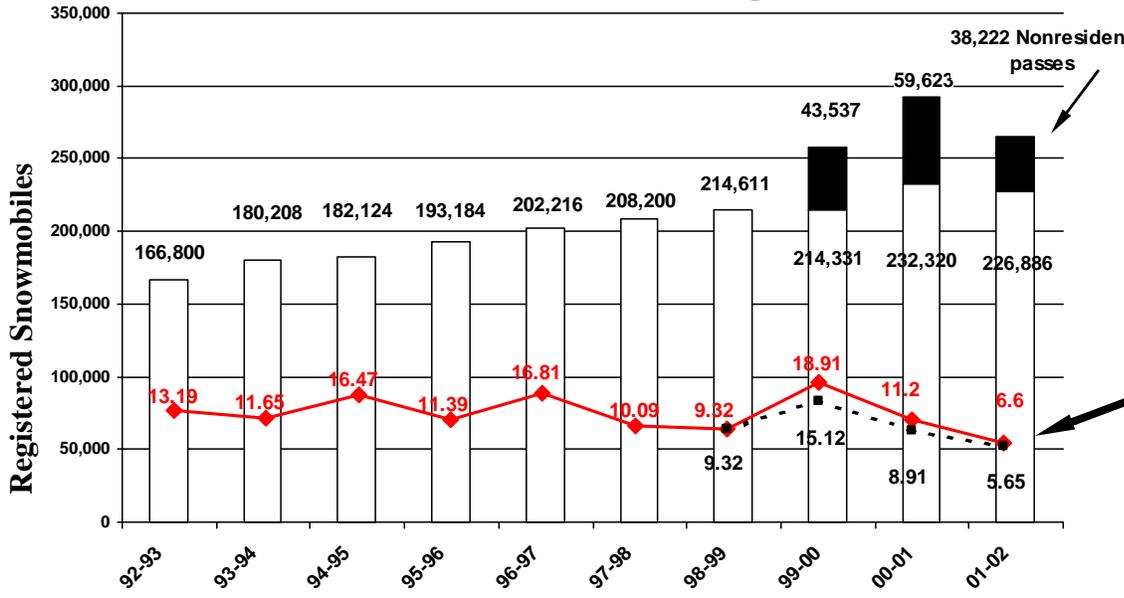


The 10-year fatal average is 25 deaths per year.

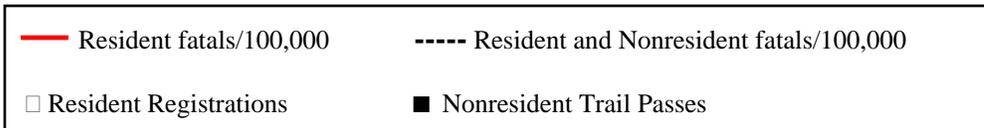
The amount of snowfall and number of hours ridden, are not reflected and can affect the number of fatalities that occur.

Beginning the 1999-2000 season, the nonresident trail pass became required for all snowmobiles not registered in WI and as a result the Department was able to identify the number of nonresident snowmobiles operated in WI.

Snowmobile Fatality Rate to Number of Snowmobiles Registered



Fatals per 100,000 Registrations.



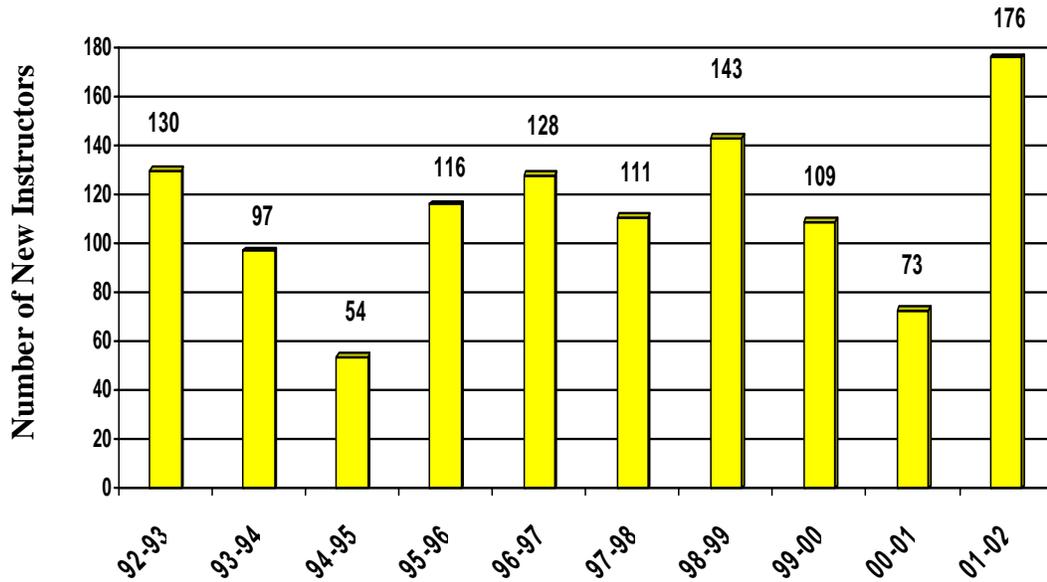
The total number of active instructors statewide for 2001-2002 was 1,181.

Over 224,167 students have been certified by instructors.

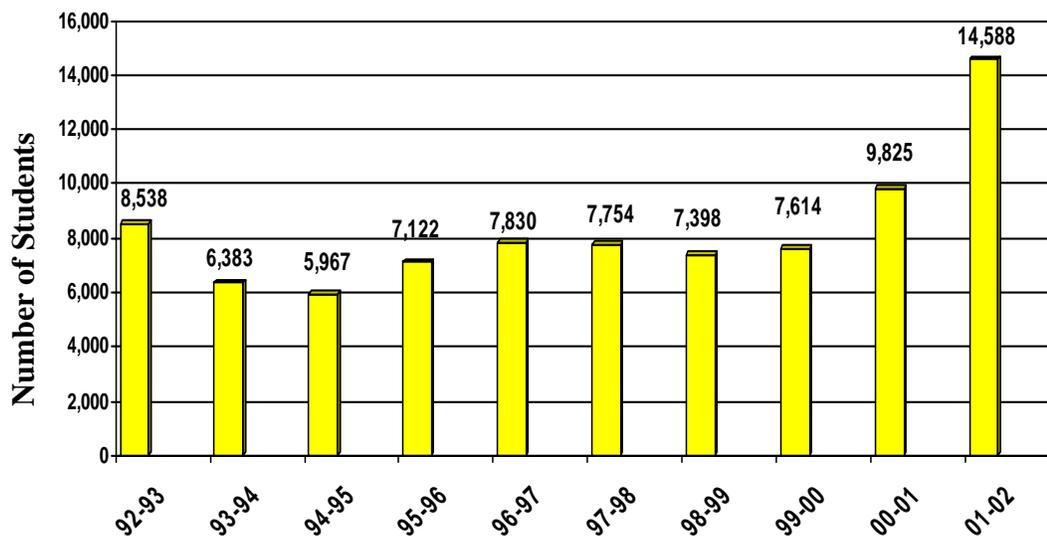
Beginning January 1, 2001 all persons born on or after January 1, 1985 were required to be certified before operating a snowmobile.

Certification requires a student to complete a basic Wisconsin snowmobile training course. Course content includes: knowing your snowmobile, maintenance and repair, riding, personal safety, winter survival, laws, courtesy and ethics.

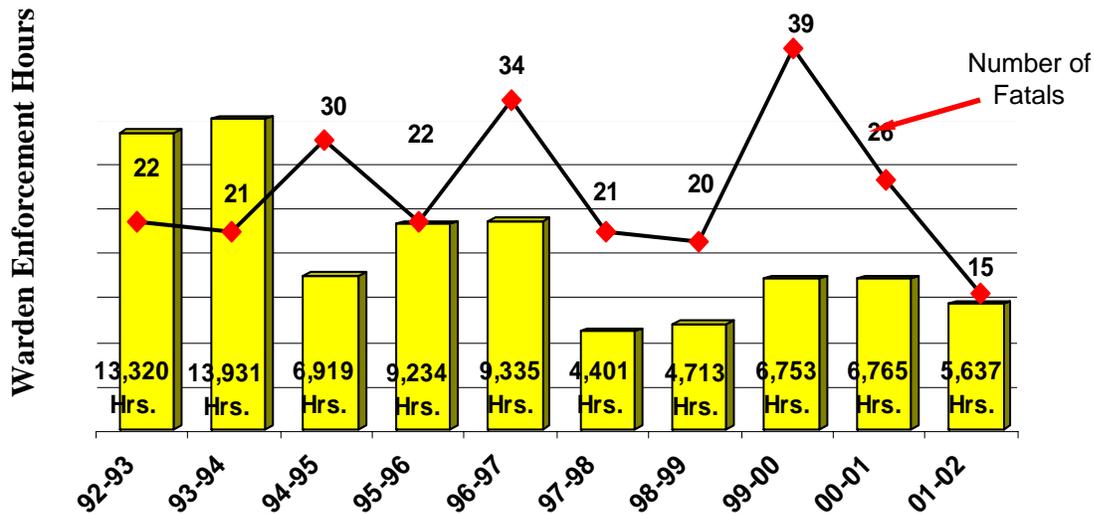
History of Certified Snowmobile Education Instructors



History of Certified Snowmobile Students

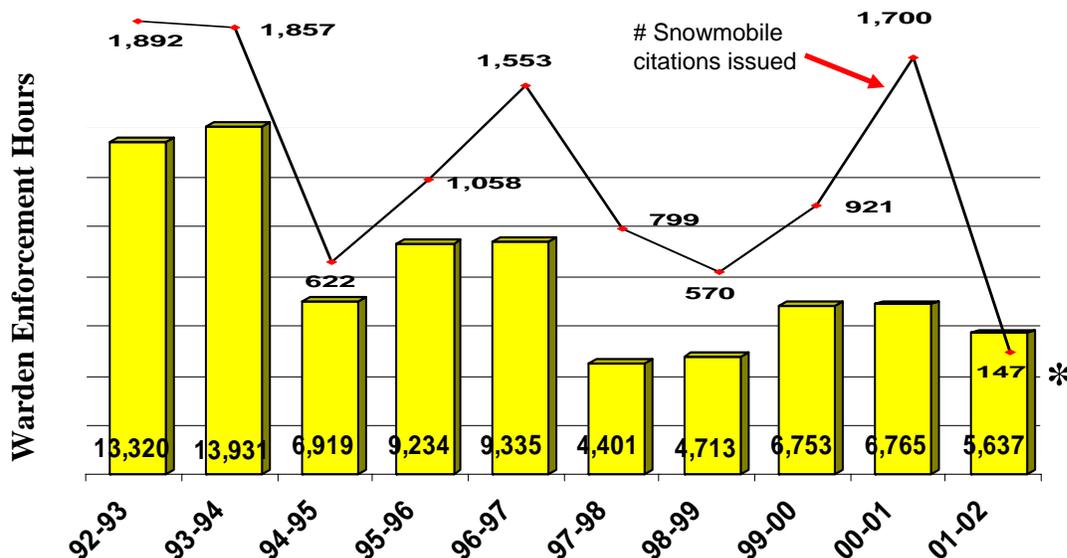


History of Snowmobile Fatality Rate to Warden Enforcement Hours



In 1999-2000, the department changed the tracking method used to collect data on the hours spent for enforcement issues. As a result, enforcement hours no longer include time involved with court, snowmobile maintenance, etc. and are more representative of the actual enforcement hours used.

History of Snowmobile Citation Rate to Warden Enforcement Hours



The citations for sheriff patrols and wardens were combined for the first time 2000-2001.

Prior to 2000-2001, the citations listed are for wardens only.

*The number of citations reported is substantially lower than previous years. See page 13 for a full explanation.

The average victim blood alcohol levels for 2001-2002 increased to 0.200.

The previous ten-year average victim blood alcohol level is 0.145.

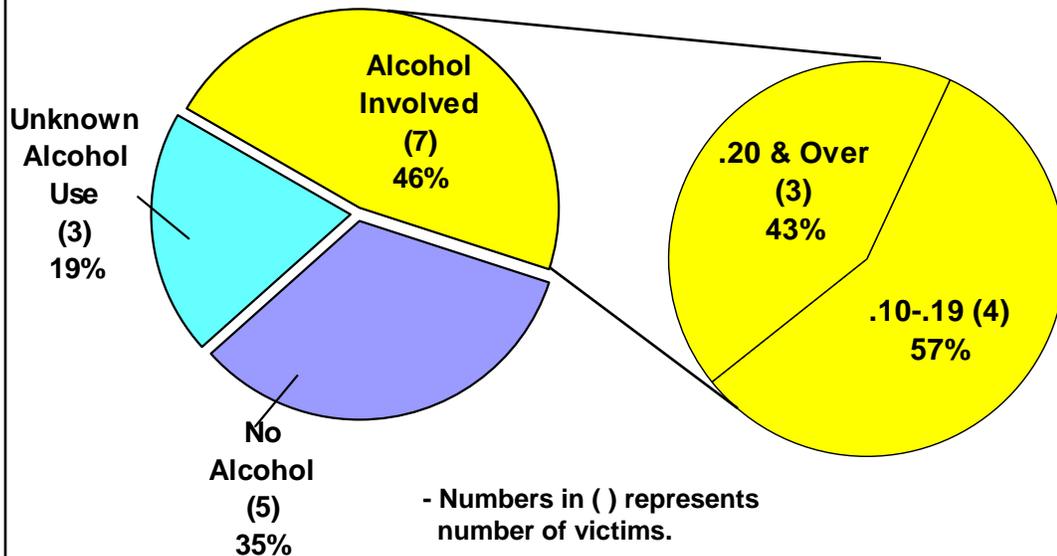
2000-2001, The average blood alcohol level for all victims reached 0.113.

The 2001-2002 season showed that alcohol was a contributing factor in 47% of all fatalities.

One 2001-2002 alcohol involved fatal was recorded at 0.330

The average age for the victims killed was 38.9 years old as compared to 31.5 years in 2000-2001.

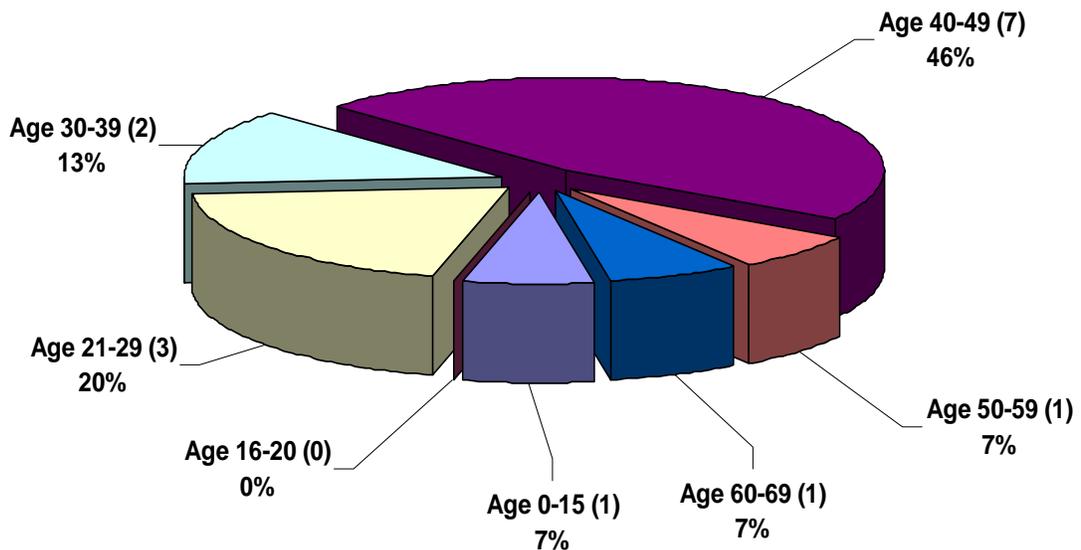
2001-2002 Alcohol Involved Snowmobile Fatalities



- Numbers in () represents number of victims.

- Blood alcohol content is grams/ml.

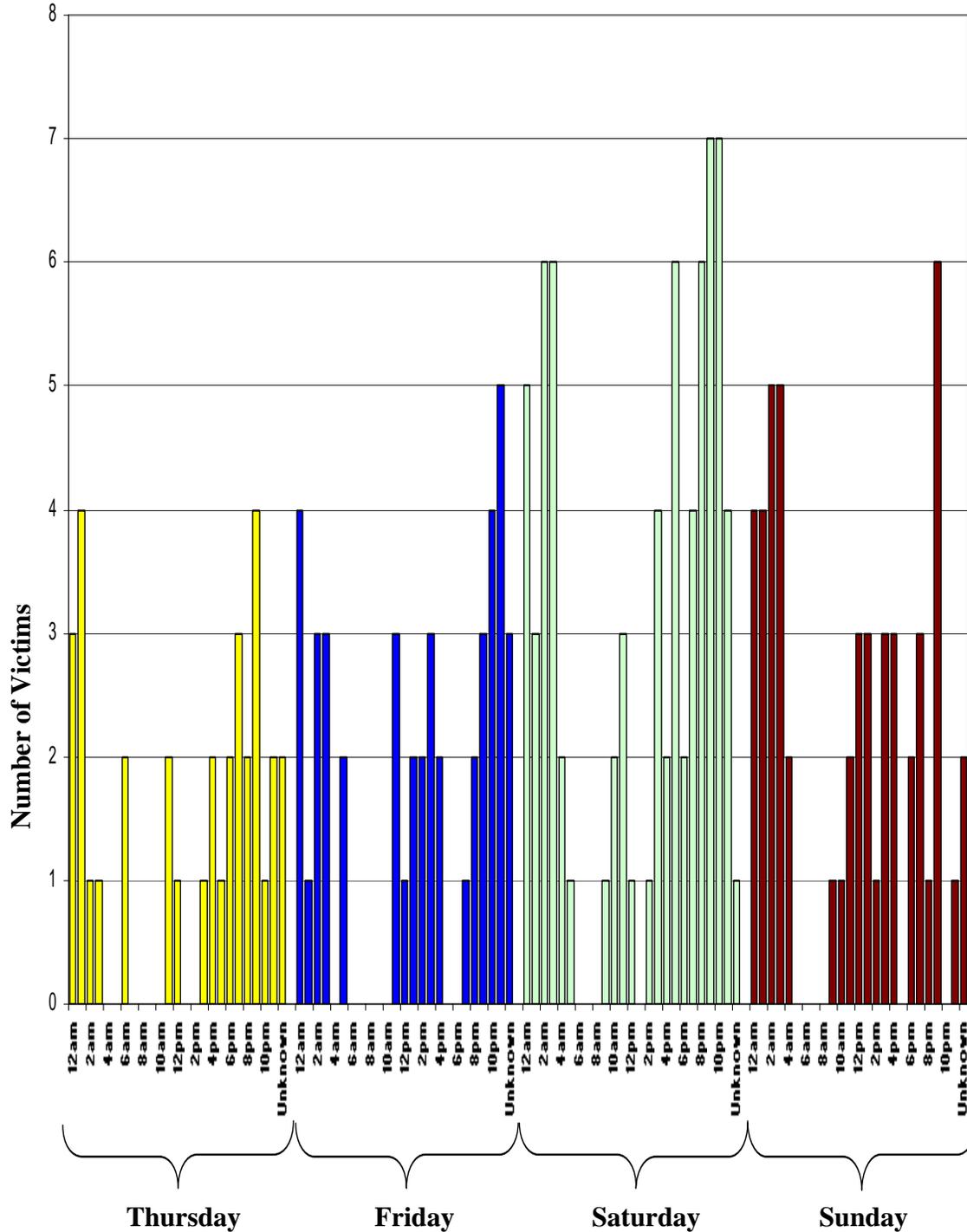
2001-2002 Age of Snowmobile Fatality Victims



Snowmobile Fatal Incidents by Time of Day

Thursdays through Sundays

1992-1993 Season through 2001-2002 Season



Fatal incidents have the highest frequency of occurrence on Saturdays.

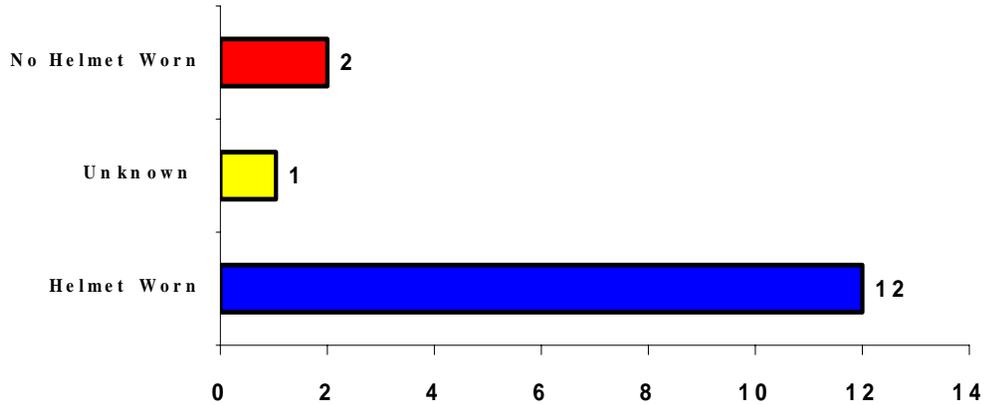
The early morning hours generally involve single operator incidents.

2001-2002 Fatal Snowmobile

Victim Helmet Use

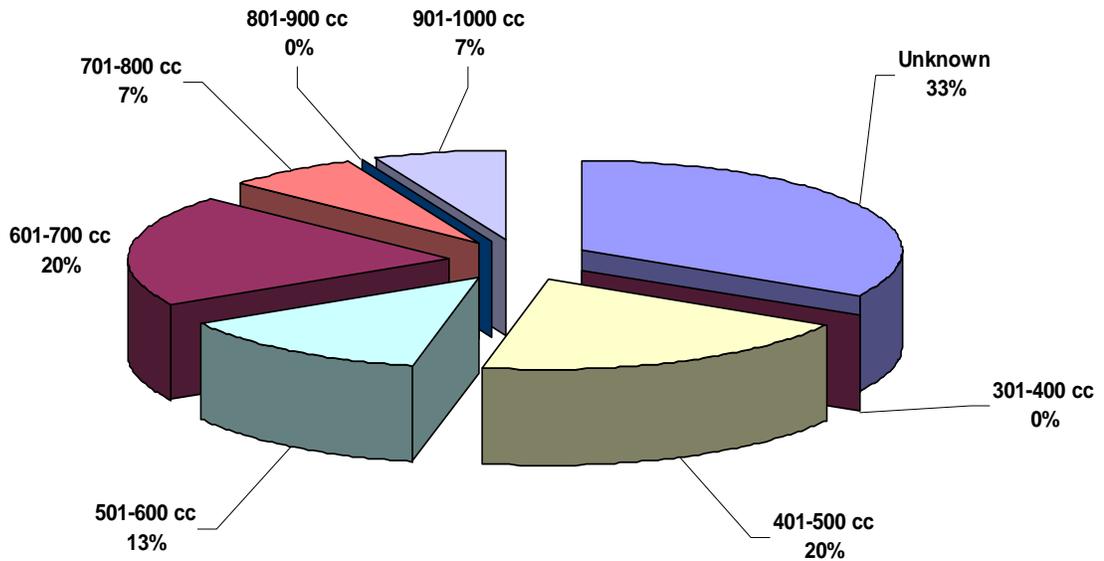
Victims traditionally wear helmets.

Unknown helmet use is because the victim was missing (drowned) or the helmet was not on the victim at the time of discovery.

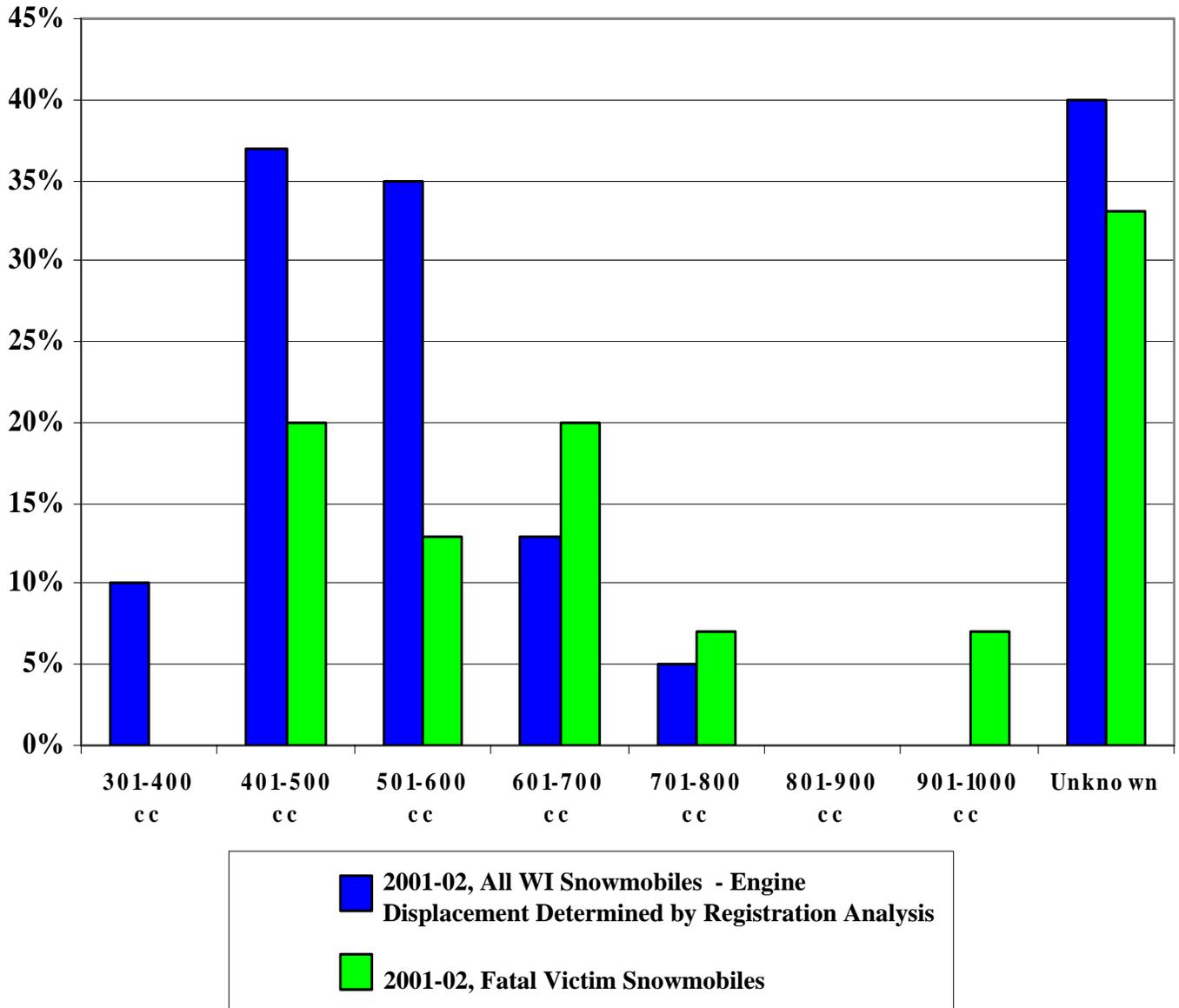


Historically, the 500 CC engine-powered snowmobile has made up the greatest number of snowmobiles involved in fatal incidents.

2001-2002 Snowmobile Engine Displacement for Machines Involved in Fatal Snowmobile Incidents



2001-2002 All Wisconsin Registered Snowmobiles Engine Displacement Compared to Victim Machines

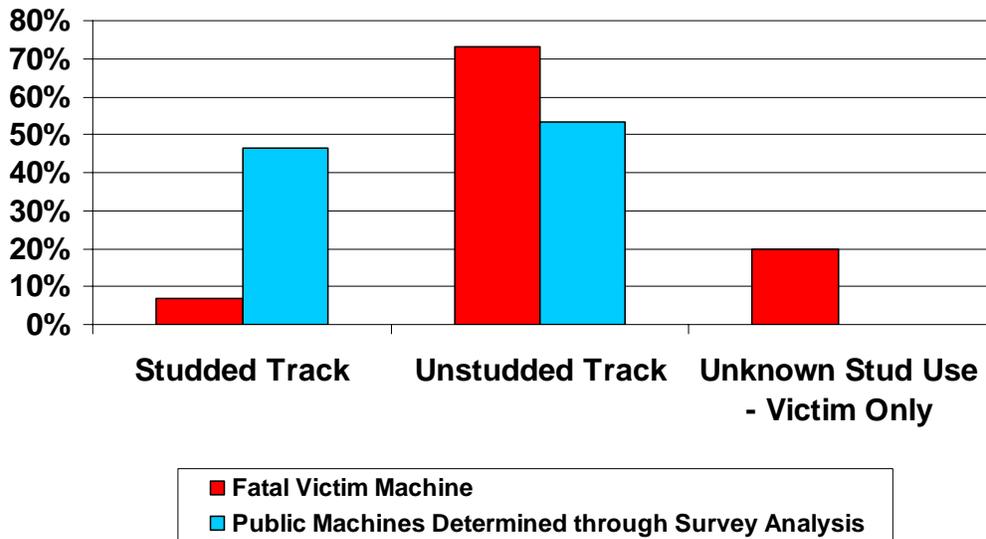


The Wisconsin snowmobile registration system contained over 90,000 (unknown) entries that either did not report a CC engine size displacement or the machine's engine capacity was recorded in horsepower units.

A survey of snowmobilers conducted in October 2001 indicates that 46.6% of the surveyed snowmobilers used studded tracks.

Source - Governor's Snowmobile Recreation Council, 10-12-01

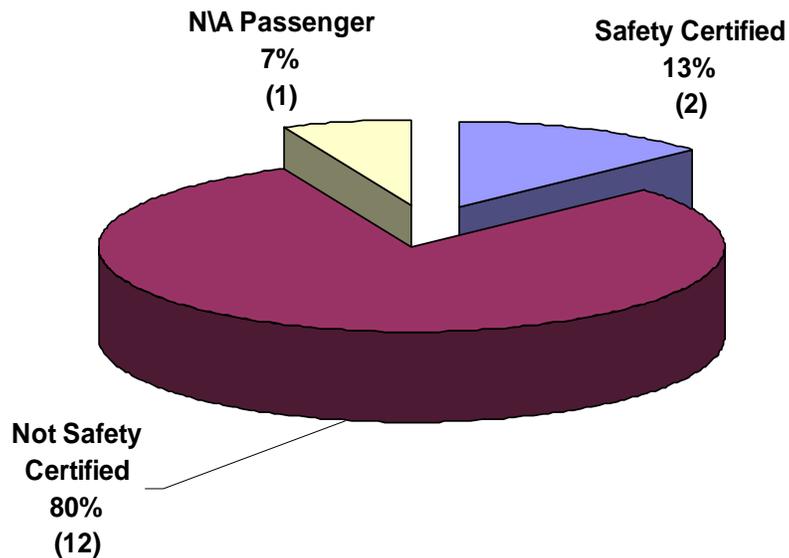
2001-2002 Studded Snowmobile Track - Fatality Victim's Use as Compared to the General Public's Snowmobiles



Beginning January 1, 2001, a Snowmobile Safety Certificate became required for all operators born on or after January 1, 1985.

Safety certifications rose by 29%, the first year mandatory education became required and rose again by 48% from 00-01 to 01-02.

2001-2002 Fatal Snowmobile Victim Operators with Wisconsin DNR Safety Training Certification



2001-2002 Citations Issued for Snowmobile Violations

Total Citations	147*
Operate Snowmobile w/o Valid Registration (S-1)	28
Fail to or Improper Display of Registration Number or Decal (S-2).....	22
Operate Snowmobile w/o Possession of Valid Certificate (S-3)	13
Fail to Transfer Registration of Snowmobile (S-4).....	4
Give Permission to Operate a Snowmobile not Registered (S-5)	10
Transport Uncased Strung Bow on a Snowmobile (S-09)	0
Shoot From a Snowmobile (S-10)	0
Operate in Prohibited Area on Lands Controlled by DNR (S-11)	6
Highway and Roadway Violations (S-12)	13
Equipment Violation (S-14).....	0
Permit Operation by Person Incapable Because	
of Age, Physical or Mental Disability (S-15).....	7
Fail to Report Snowmobile Accident (S-16).....	0
Operate at/in Unreasonable, Improper or Careless Speed/manner (S-17)	4
Fail to Display Lights when Required (S-18)	0
Trespass 'Sec. 350.10(6) through (13) Wis. Stats.' (S-19)	8
Miscellaneous (S-20)	1
Dealer Failing to Collect Fee & Submit Registration Applications (S-21).....	0
Fail to Stop for Law Enforcement Officer (S-22).....	0
Fail to Render Aid (S-23).....	0
Operate Snowmobile while Intoxicated (S-24).....	2
Operate Snowmobile with Alcohol Concentration Above .1% (S-25)	2
Refuse to Take Intoxicated Snowmobile Test (S-26)	1
Absolute Sobriety for Persons Under 19 (S-27)	0
Operate Snowmobile that Makes Excessive or Unusual Noise (S-28)	8
Operate Snowmobile w/o Muffler on Engine (S-29).....	5
Cause Injury by Intoxicated Operation of Snowmobile (S-30).....	0
Operate w/o Trail Use Sticker (S-33)	12
Operate (Manufacture or Seller) Snowmobile w/o Functioning Muffler (S-34)	0
Fail to Comply with Regulatory Signs (S-35).....	1

Citations reflect Sheriff Patrol and Conservation Warden data.

- * **The number of citations reported is substantially lower than previous years. The 2001-2002 snowmobile season start and conclusion directly effected the number of citations issued and processed through the court system. As a result, the Department recognizes that an abnormal number of citations have not been returned from the court system and have not been entered into the DNR citation database. A full accounting of citations will not be completed until late October due to the snow season activity in March 2002.**

WI Snowmobile Fatal Incidents, December 2001 - March 2002

Incident #	Date	Location	Type	Age	BAC
			Cause of death Primary/Secondary	Sex	Residency Safety Cert.
1.	12-26-01	Dorothy Lake	Fell through ice	30	0.148
	21:15	Oneida County (Lake)	Drowning hypothermia Thin ice/Alcohol	Male	WI No

The victim had been at a tavern drinking on the evening of the 26th and had returned home in a truck. The victim reportedly called a friend and told him he was going to go to Lake Tomahawk by snowmobile for a drink. The victim was not heard from for 2 days and was reported missing on the 29th. The victim was located under the ice of Dorothy Lake on 12-31-01 at around 1pm.

Incident #	Date	Location	Type	Age	BAC
			Cause of death Primary/Secondary	Sex	Residency Safety Cert.
2.	01-01-02	Reservoir Pond	Fell through ice	74	Unknown
	13:32	Oconto (Lake)	Hypothermia Thin ice/unfamiliar area	Male	WI No

The victim was observed by two fishermen traveling across Reservoir Pond on a snowmobile when he struck an area of thin ice. The victim then tried to accelerate out, but the snowmobile broke through the ice in about 5 to 10 ft. of water. The two fishermen were successful in getting victim out of water by paddling an inner-tube to victim and grabbing him. The two rescuers started CPR. The victim was then transported to Langlade Memorial Hospital and then air lifted to Wausau where he died.

Incident #	Date	Location	Type	Age	BAC
			Cause of death Primary/Secondary	Sex	Residency Safety Cert.
3.	01-19-02	Town of Boulder	Struck a tree	32	0.17
	04:30	Vilas (Public Trail)	Multiple trauma Alcohol/speed	Male	IL No

The victim was 4th in a line of 5 snowmobilers traveling on a road. The road is unmaintained and part of the trail system. The snowmobilers were going downhill into a minimal "S" curve, when the victim lost control on the second curve and crashed into some trees immediately off of the road. The victim died at the scene. Alcohol is suspected to be a factor. The companions estimated speeds of 35 mph, however the investigation indicates higher speeds were involved.

Incident #	Date	Location	Type	Age	BAC
			Cause of death Primary/Secondary	Sex	Residency Safety Cert.
4.	01-19-02	Town of Tomahawk	Struck a RR Tie	49	0.0
	20:30	Lincoln (Public Trail)	Massive head injury Unfamiliar area	Female	WI No

A male snowmobile operator and female passenger were southbound on the Hiawatha Trail (railroad grade) coming into the north side of the City of Tomahawk. The operator failed to negotiate a curve and continued straight onto a section of railroad. The snowmobile stopped upon striking a railroad tie, which was cabled across the rails. Both the operator and passenger were ejected off the snowmobile. The Operator was wearing a helmet and sustained minor injuries (bumps and bruises). The female passenger stuck her head on a railroad tie and sustained massive head injuries, resulting in her death.

Incident #	Date	Location	Type	Age	BAC
			Cause of death Primary/Secondary		
5.	1-20-02	Town of New	Struck by another	29	0.0
	12:30	Brown (Private land)	snowmobile Head/Chest injury Blind hill	Male	WI No

A snowmobile operated by the victim was traveling west bound in a snow-covered field. Another snowmobile (#2) was traveling east bound in same field. The two snowmobiles collided head on near the crest of a hill. The #2 snowmobile continued over the top of the victim's snowmobile striking the victim. The victim was thrown from snowmobile and may have been dragged by snowmobile #2. The victim was pronounced dead at the scene. The victim from snowmobile #2 was taken to the hospital for a cut to the head and a possible broken wrist.

Incident #	Date	Location	Type	Age	BAC
			Cause of death Primary/Secondary		
6.	01-31-02	Town of Dekorra	Struck a fixed object	40	0.103
	21:30	Columbia County (Private Land)	Head injury Speed/alcohol	Male	WI No

The victim left a bar and traveled several hundred yards out onto Lake Wisconsin. The victim then drove towards shore and collided with the uneven shoreline. The machine struck a flagpole. Subject was ejected and struck a large tree that was near shore.

Incident #	Date	Location	Type	Age	BAC
			Cause of death Primary/Secondary		
7.	02-02-02	City of Fond Du Lac	Water skipping,	55	.21
	20:30	Lake Winnebago Fond du Lac (Lake)	Drowning Thin ice/Alcohol	Female	WI No

A male and female were snowmobiling on Lake Winnebago and started at approximately 3:30pm that day. The two snowmobilers had stopped for dinner and drinks at a local business. Both were operating their own snowmobiles on Lake Winnebago at approximately 8:20pm; the male was in the lead with the female following. The male skipped across open water and when he looked back, he saw that female did not make it across. The male returned to the female and tried to rescue her, but he was unable to get her out of the water. He estimated he held onto her about one hour. The male left the area for help. The female was recovered at approximately 1:40am on 02-03-02 by a rescue team using a hover craft and was pronounced dead at 3:45am.

Incident #	Date	Location	Type	Age	BAC
			Cause of death Primary/Secondary		
8.	02-10-02	City of Wausau	Fell through ice	40	0.261
	21:30	Lake Wausau Marathon (Lake)	Drowning Alcohol/Thin ice	Male	WI No

The victim and a companion spent the afternoon and evening snowmobiling on the ice to local taverns using one snowmobile. The victim-operator and a passenger left a tavern with intention on traveling to another tavern. The victim apparently became disoriented and headed into the main stream area of the WI River (Lake Wausau) near the sewage treatment area discharge. The snowmobile broke through thin ice. The female companion was able to grab the ice until she was rescued. The victim submerged below the surface before a rescue could be made. The victim's body was recovered on 02-11-02 by the Marathon Sheriff's dive team. The investigation indicates the victim was intoxicated and became disoriented.

Incident #	Date	Location	Type Cause of death Primary/Secondary	Age Sex	BAC Residency Safety Cert.
9.	02-16-02 00:15	Town of Lac du Flambeau Vilas (Lake)	Struck a fixed object Multiple trauma Alcohol/Speed	44 Male	.330 IL No

The victim was part of two-party snowmobile group operating on a marked area across Fence Lake. The victim-operator missed a curve, went off the trail and hit the shore embankment of the lake. The snowmobile was launched into the air. The victim hit a large pine tree and was killed instantly. The snowmobile continued and hit the roof of a cabin and broke several trees. Speed was estimated at 60 to 70-mph.

Incident #	Date	Location	Type Cause of death Primary/Secondary	Age Sex	BAC Residency Safety Cert.
10.	02-10-02 12:00	Town of Hiles Forest (Public right of way)	Struck trees Internal Injuries Speed	42 Male	Unknown WI No

The incident occurred on 02-10-02, but the victim died 02-27-02. Wardens were not immediately made aware of the incident until after 02-27-02 and the incident is still under investigation. Basic information is that the victim was operating on Four Duck Lane with about 7-8 other snowmobilers. It is believed the victim was the last rider and that he went off the road becoming seriously injured during impact with tree(s). The victim died 17 days later of injuries sustained in this incident.

Incident #	Date	Location	Type Cause Primary/Secondary	Age Sex	BAC Residency Safety Cert.
11.	03-01-02 16:00	Town of Three Lakes Oneida (Public road)	Struck by automobile Massive internal injuries Fail to stop at sign	14 Male	Unknown WI Yes

The victim was operating a snowmobile on a non-funded snowmobile trail. The victim failed to stop the snowmobile while crossing state highway 45. The victim was struck by a vehicle that was traveling south on state highway 45. The victim died 3-2-02 from the injuries sustained in this incident.

Incident #	Date	Location	Type Cause Primary/Secondary	Age Sex	BAC Residency Safety Cert.
12.	03-07-02 11:00	Town of Spirit Price (Public trail)	Struck by falling tree Massive head injury Logging operation	40 Male	0.0 WI Yes

The victim was the 2nd snowmobiler in a group of three that were traveling on a public snowmobile trail through a wooded area. The group came upon an active logging operation just as a large maple tree was felled. The tree started to fall across the trail when first snowmobiler had just passed the spot. The victim attempted to brake and take evasive maneuvers, sliding sideways in the trail. The victim was struck in the shoulder area by the falling tree. The victim was knocked off the snowmobile and the tree landed on the victim's head killing him instantly. The third snowmobiler was able to stop prior to hitting the downed tree.

Incident #	Date	Location	Type Cause		BAC
			Primary/Secondary	Age & Sex	Residency Safety Cert.
13.	03-07-02	Town of Boulder	Struck a tree		0.0
	12:30	Vilas	Head injury		WI
		(Public trail)	Speed/Inattentive		No

The victim was 3rd in a group of three snowmobilers traveling on a road, which is unplowed and part of the snowmobile trail system. The victim was operating a newly acquired snowmobile. The incident was not witnessed, however the investigation indicates that the victim apparently became distracted, drifted to the right and went off the trail. After leaving the trail, the machine and victim struck a small stump. The machine then hit a second stump and eventually became airborne after impacting a log on the ground. The snowmobile struck several trees while airborne. The victim also became airborne. The victim impacted a tree with his head and succumbed to his injuries.

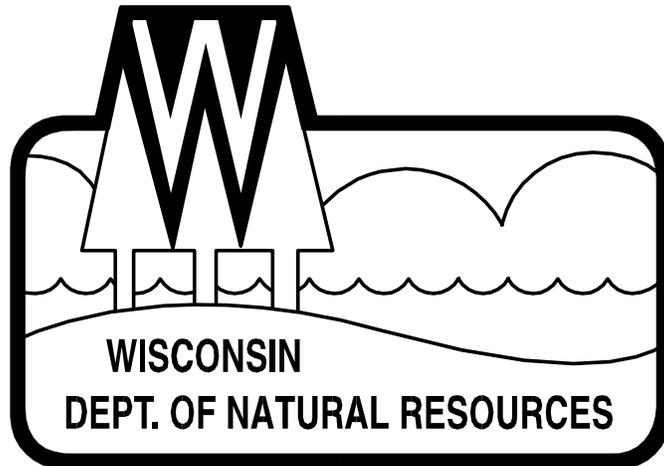
Incident #	Date	Location	Type Cause		BAC
			Primary/Secondary	Age & Sex	Residency Safety Cert.
14.	03-08-02	Town of Jackson	Struck a tree		.184
	00:30	Burnett	Internal injuries		WI
		(Public trail)	Speed/Weather		No

At approximately 12:30 AM, the victim was observed leaving a tavern in Webster, WI via snowmobile. When morning arrived it was discovered the victim had failed to return home during the night. The victim's body was discovered at approximately 9:00 AM the morning of 3-08-02. Investigation indicated the victim had been traveling south on a snowmobile trail that traversed a lake. The victim strayed off the trail to the left and went into some trees. The victim was killed due to apparent head injuries.

Incident #	Date	Location	Type Cause		BAC
			Primary/Secondary	Age & Sex	Residency Safety Cert.
15.	03-23-02	Town of Morse	Struck a tree		Trace
	23:02	Ashland	Internal injuries		WI
		(Public trail)	Speed		No

The victim operator was overdue. A search by other members of his group found him crashed in the woods along a road. The victim was initially treated in the Ashland Hospital and transferred to a Duluth hospital. It was reported on April 3, 2002 that the victim died March 30, 2002 as a result of his injuries sustained from the crash.

SLOW DOWN
...RIDE SOBER...
&
RIDE FOR LIFE



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