

Vermont Legislative Research Shop

Snowmobile Safety

Thousands of snowmobiling accidents occur in the United States every year resulting in hundreds of injuries and deaths. According to the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report issued by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in 2002-2003, the main causes of deaths resulting from snowmobile accidents was; excessive speed, inattentiveness or careless operation, and inexperience. In states where snowmobiling is a popular form of winter recreation there are many laws and regulations governing the use of

A snowmobile operator will also be charged a \$500.00 fine if they drive the snowmobile during closed season or when authorities have closed the trails during open season. This new law also gives law enforcement the right to perform safety inspections on the machine even if they stop the operator for other violations. Safety inspections may also be conducted in a designated area of the trail by law enforcement officials (VT Dept. of Public Safety, 2007). Snowmobiling while intoxicated (SWI) is illegal, with the same legal blood alcohol limit as DWI, which is 0.08. Penalties may include fines, loss of snowmobiling privileges and imprisonment (VT DMV, 1998). While this statement is still valid, H.397 gives authorities the right to punish the operator under the current DUI laws of the state of Vermont. This could potentially have an effect on the status of operator's driver's license in addition to the punishments mentioned above.

Table 1: State Snowmobiling Laws

STATE	REGISTRATION REQUIRED	MINIMUM AGE TO OPERATE ¹	SAFETY EDUCATION REQUIRED	OTHER REQUIRE- MENTS	SAFETY EQUIPMENT REQUIRED	NOISE LAWS (MAXIMUM DECIBELS)
Indiana	Yes	14	NA	NA	NA	Muffler Required
Maine	Yes	14	None	Fish and		

Other States

Maine Snowmobile Regulations

Registration of the snowmobile is required for residents and non-residents of the state if they are riding on the state trail system. A resident pays \$33 dollars annually for the registration of their machine. Non-residents have three options when purchasing registration from the state. “A 3 consecutive day registration is \$43; a 10 consecutive days is \$58 and a full season is \$68. (Plus an agent's processing fee of \$1-\$2)” (Maine Snowmobile Association, 2008). Maine allows children 10 years of age or older

of an adult. In addition, persons who are 12 years or older but not 17 can not operate a snowmobile unless they are accompanied by a pe

from their home state or country are legal in this state. All resident snowmobile operators born after 12/31/76 are required to have a Snowmobile Safety Certificate. Helmets are required for all riders who are 18 years of age or younger. The speed limit of the nearest road sets the speed limit for the particular trail in question. The maximum speed allowed within the state is 50mph (American Council of Snowmobile Associations).

Nebraska Regulations

All snowmobiles operated within the state require some sort of registration. Registrations from other states or countries are valid in the state. Registration from the state is available at \$17.50 and must be renewed every two years. There are no trail permit requirements for the state trails. Helmets are a mandatory requirement for all riders. No individual under 12 years of age is allowed to operate a snowmobile unless under supervision of an adult 18 years of age or older. Individuals between the ages of 12 and 15 may operate a snowmobile only if they have a valid Snowmobile Safety Certificate and must be in the company of an individual 14 years or older who holds a valid safety certificate as well. Violation of the state snowmobile laws is a class 3 misdemeanor, which means that if convicted the maximum penalty could be 3 months imprisonment, a \$500.00 fine or both (Nebraska Game and Parks Commission).

Fatal Accident Information

Despite these rules and regulations, accidents do happen and death or serious injuries often result. In Alaska, for 1993-1994, there were higher injury death and hospitalization rates reported for snowmobiles (off-road vehicles) than for on-road motor vehicles. Over half of these snowmobile injury-induced deaths involved natural objects such as boulders, rivers, and ravines. Of the people who died as a result of a snowmobile accident and for whom blood alcohol levels were available, 65% had BAC levels of 0.10 or higher (Landen, et al., 1999).

In Maine, snowmobiling accidents became more prevalent in the 1995-1996 winter season; however, snowmobile registration rates also rose to record levels. Of the 1,355 snowmobile accidents, which occurred between the years of 1991 and 1996, 80% were due to excessive speed or careless operation; thirteen per cent were due to alcohol intoxication (CDC, 1997).

New Hampshire reported 165 non-fatal injuries and 12 deaths resulting from snowmobile accidents in a fourteen-month period (January 1989 to February 1992). These accidents disproportionately involve males between the ages of 20 and 29. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), "67% of all fatal accidents were alcohol-related and 67% were associated with excessive speed" (CDC 1995).

In Wisconsin, the historic leading causes of snowmobile accidents were excessive speed and alcohol intoxication. The 1997-98 *Snowmobile Fatal Accident Report* showed that there were 21 fatal snowmobile accidents. For those years the two main causes of accidents were collision with fixed objects and falling through ice. Also interesting to note is that "80% of operators involved in fatal accidents had not received Snowmobile Safety Training" (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources).

Figure 3: Snowmobile fatalities between 1990 and 2003 for Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont.

Dealers may alternatively require anyone renting or leasing a snowmobile to carry insurance at or above these levels.

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Minnesota Department of Natural Resource, “Snowmobile Operators,” and other sites
Available: http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/trails_and_waterways/regulations/snowmobile/