

The onset of prolonged below freezing temperatures can cause the surface area of lakes, ponds, creeks, and ditches to freeze over and form a super thin sheet of ice. The problem with this is that the ice is thin and extremely unstable. Water seldom freezes uniformly, thus posing an extreme danger to anyone attempting to stand or walk on the ice. The ice may freeze to almost a few inches thick in one location (rarely the case in southern states) and be only a few centimeters thick a foot or two away. It can look inviting, but firefighters warn against using the frozen surface as a skating rink or a place to play. Doing so endangers the lives of emergency services personnel and the person(s) potentially in need of rescue. The thickness of the ice that forms on bodies of water in metro Atlanta is simply not strong enough to hold the weight of an adult, child, or even a large animal.

An unforgettable tragedy struck in Gwinnett County in January 2010, when three teens fell through the ice in the middle of a neighborhood pond in Dacula. One teen managed to self extricate from the ice and then tried to rescue the other two. Firefighters pulled the two submerged teens from the bottom of the frozen pond and administered advanced life support efforts. The two boys were pronounced dead shortly after arrival at the hospital. The goal is to prevent such a tragedy from ever happening again.

If you do fall through a frozen body of water, remember to stay calm: reach for solid ice, kick to exit the hole, and then roll to safety toward the shore. Never attempt to go out on the ice to rescue another person in distress. Try to reach the victim using a long-pole or a throw rope bag and stay on the shore. Be prepared to treat the person for hypothermia or shock and seek medical attention right away.



Stay safe and enjoy the winter weather season by following a few simple rules:

1. Avoid playing, skating, or driving over any frozen body of water. This includes lakes, ponds, creeks, and ditches. Remember that only the surface area is frozen and the ice is extremely thin. It will not be thick enough to hold the weight of an adult, child, or a large animal.
2. If you have an open body of water in your property, keep an eye out for children who may be adventurist. Post warnings around the area and provide an access barrier whenever possible.
3. Dress in layers of warm insulated clothing and limit your time out in the cold weather.
4. Monitor weather and road conditions before going out for the day and notify family and friends of your plans.
5. Use home heating appliances in a safe manner. Remember to extinguish the fire in the fireplace and turn off space heaters before going to bed or when you leave the house.
6. Install and maintain smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms in the home. Develop a home escape plan and hold fire drills to practice.