




If you fall through the ice, these are the people who come rescue you. Members of Montrose Fire and Montrose County Sheriff's Posse take part in ice rescue training at Blue Mesa reservoir. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

# Ice fishing and ice safety



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

We are fortunate to live in Colorado where we have a full four seasons and all the activities associated with each. Winter has been somewhat mild and dry in our area, while it is raging in other parts of the state.

In my younger days in Colorado, we waited anxiously for the local ponds to freeze up so we could play hockey. None of us paid particular attention to ice safety. We were lucky that the ponds were very shallow, and froze quickly. If we broke through, we were looking at getting wet up to our knees.

My Dad was big into fishing, and of course, so was I. When the lakes would finally freeze over, Dad and I would bring out the ice fishing gear and spend weekends fishing through a small hole in the ice.

Nowadays, if I feel the urge to go ice fishing, I stand in the backyard while my wife shovels snow down my back. If, after an hour of that, I still feel the urge, I pack my gear and head up to Blue Mesa.

On Dec. 28 of last year, a 12-year old boy fell through the ice on Chipeta Lake, while he was attempting to cross. The boy was able to pull himself out of the water but was still stuck on the ice. Thankfully, an alert motorist witnessed the incident and called Montrose Fire and EMS who came and saved the boy. Response time was quick and the boy made a full recovery.

When you are outdoors in the mountains the ice you encounter can be everything from a stock pond, beaver dam, lake, stream or a man-made reservoir. Sometimes these are chance encounters, happening upon it while hiking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling or other activity. Then sometimes it would be on purpose such as ice fishing. Either way, some basic safety guidelines and possible self-rescue tips are in order.

Even though it has been well below freezing does not mean the lakes are ready for ice fishing. If you are heading to one of the state parks, check with staff on site, or call Colorado Parks and Wildlife ahead of time. They can advise on ice condition and if you can safely be on it.

Keep in mind that ice needs to be at least 4 inches thick to support your walking across. Even then, 6 inches thick is a much better number for safety. Six inches is the magic number for taking an ATV on the ice. Ice should be closer to 10 inches thick to safely support a vehicle, and pick-up trucks require a foot or more. When in doubt, stay off the ice.

Look for any visible signs that may indicate the ice is unsafe. This would include different colors, water on top of the ice, cracks, open water and air bubbles. Be especially concerned with snow-covered ice.

Snow can serve as an insulator, keeping ice from melting. Snow can also insulate the surface from freezing. Changing water levels in a lake or reservoir can also affect the integrity of ice. Clear blue ice is the color you are looking for.

If you are going to cross the ice, here are a few safety tips to keep in mind. The buddy system is the best plan. Having a second person to follow behind a safe distance, or stay off the ice while you cross.

You should have a pair of ice pitons. Pitons are a handheld spike that allows you to crawl out of the hole should you break through the surface. Without something to dig into the ice with it would be impossible for you to pull yourself out of the hole. Pitons are the best method of self-rescue there is as they do not weigh much and are fairly inexpensive.

Take off the heavy clothes, backpack and other gear. It may sound crazy but you do not want to fall through the ice with all those heavy clothes and equipment on. The lighter you can make yourself, the safer you will be.

In the event you do break through the ice, the first thing to worry about is not hypothermia but getting yourself out. You probably only have about 60 seconds. Turn around and face the direction you were coming from, as that is probably the strongest ice. Jam your pitons into the ice and begin kicking with all your might while you pull and inch your way back out unto the top of the ice.

When you are on the ice again, don't crawl. Roll your body away from the hole and get off the ice as quickly as possible. That means dry clothes and a warm fire immediately. Now is the time that your buddy can really help, which is another reason for the buddy system.

If you are the buddy on shore when your partner falls through, remember reach, throw and go. If you can't reach the person from shore, throw a flotation device or rope. If this does not help the victim quickly, go for help. Never venture out unto the ice to try and rescue them. If Murphy is along, there will be two people in need of rescue.

It is always a good idea to keep the dogs on a leash when around the ice. If the dog ventures onto the ice and fall through, do not attempt a rescue. Go for help immediately. If the ice will not

support your dog, it definitely will not support you.

If you venture out on the ice, please do it safely and take all the necessary precautions. As for me, I will just stick to hockey on the ice and wait for the thaw to go fishing.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and an avid hunter who travels across North America in search of adventure and serves as a director and public information officer for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse, call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email [info@mcspi.org](mailto:info@mcspi.org).

### Outdoor notes

On Jan. 11, 2018, Colorado Parks and Wildlife created a seasonal closure on shed antler and horn collection on all public lands west of I-25 through April 30 annually. This will take effect on these public lands beginning March 1, 2018.

The new regulations also include a closure to collection of shed antlers on public lands May 1 to May 15, from sunset to 10 a.m. in the Gunnison Basin (GMU 54, 55, 66, 67, 551) to protect Gunnison Sage Grouse.

The purpose of this closure is to reduce the recreational impacts from shed hunting on wintering big game animals during the time of year when deer, elk, pronghorn, and moose are the most vulnerable to stress. The result of this stress can be decreased body condition, increased mortality, and decreased fawn/calf survival.

For more information, see the CPW website at [www.cpw.state.co.us](http://www.cpw.state.co.us)



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### When should I list my home to sell?

Often times Realtors are ask this question. If you are seriously thinking about it, now is the right time. Even though it's technically winter (and doesn't feel like it), if your house is ready, because of our incredibly low inventory, Sellers should not wait. This is a GREAT time to sell. Spring and Summer Buyers are already out there looking. Instead of waiting till the "grass turns green" to list, get ahead of the game and list your house now! As far as putting your house on the market, February is the new March or April.



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