



Ice Changes & Safety

Our changing climate is changing ice coverage, which has impacts for lake health, and for personal safety.

On Thin Ice

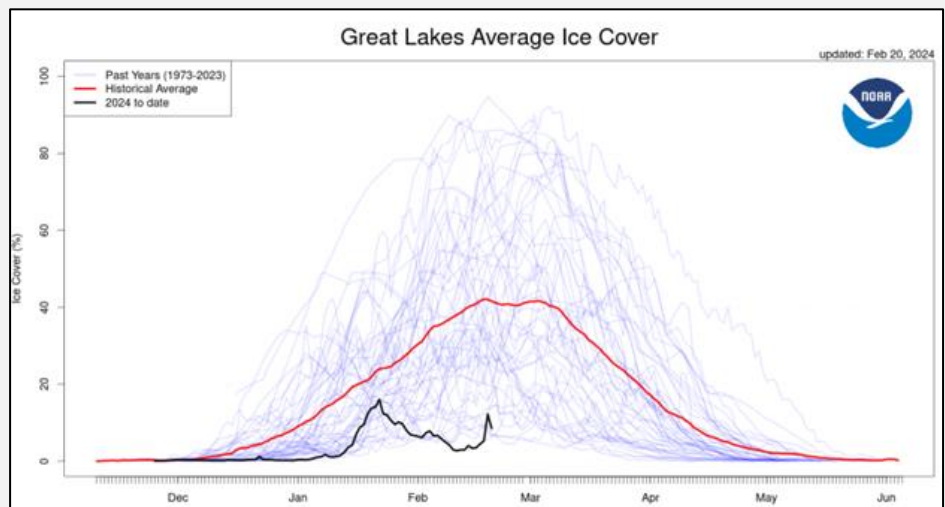
Jan 02, 2025 — One person was found dead on New Year's Day, with one other person still missing when they fell through thin ice near Temiskaming Shores. The two are a father and daughter. (Global News)

Feb 03, 2024 — A man died after falling through the ice while riding an ATV on the shore of Lake Simcoe. (CTV News)

Feb 12, 2024 — The OPP say three people went through the ice while fishing on Charleston Lake, northeast of Kingston. (Global News)

Many thanks to FOCA, Cottage Life, & Cottagelink for much of this material.

You're not imagining it: there really is much less ice on our waterways. In the image below, the red line is the historic average for the Great Lakes, while the dark black line is the actual 2023-2024 season to March. Past years from 1973 onward are shown in purple.



Source: Great Lakes Environmental Research Library, Feb.20, 2024

Ice is forming later and melting earlier, leaving a shorter period of seasonal ice cover. In recent decades, many lakes experienced the shortest seasons of ice cover ever recorded. This essentially “lifts the lid” on a lake during winter and leads to year-round evaporation, accelerating the rate at which water is lost. Salts and nutrients build up and are concentrated in the remaining water, leading to a decline in water quality.

Ice loss can also lead to year-round impacts on lake ecology. Earlier ice break-up in spring leads to warmer summer water temperatures. Coldwater fish, such as Walleye and Muskellunge, are squeezed out of their cool, well-oxygenated, deep-water habitat.

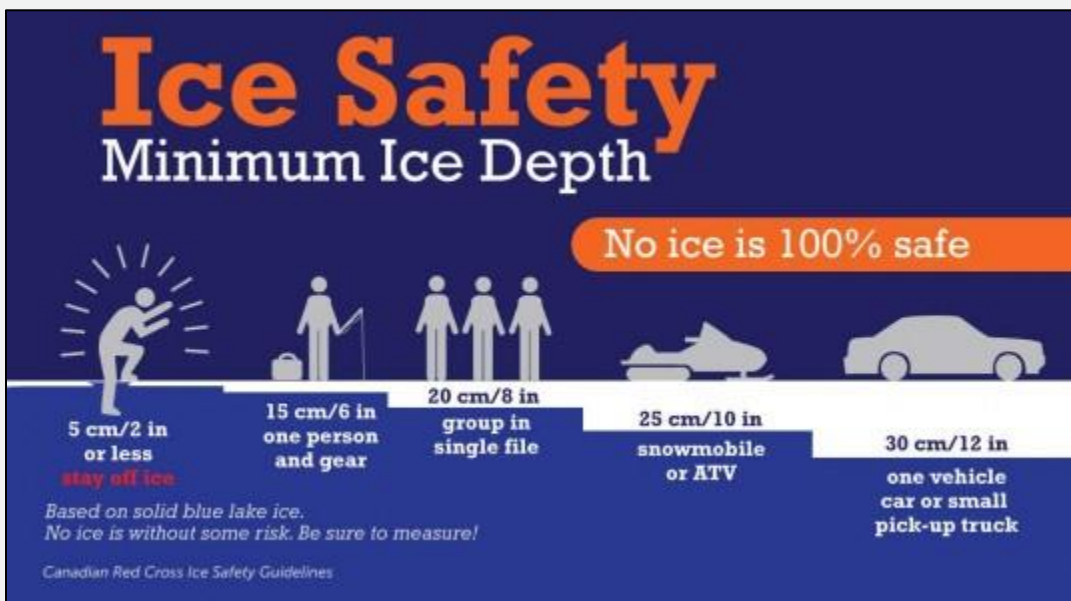
Warmer summers and larger quantities of nutrients create the perfect conditions for earlier, more frequent and intense algal blooms. Harmful toxin-producing blue-green algae that form floating surface blooms, can lead to mass mortality of fish and birds, as well as posing a serious health threat.

Ice Changes & Safety

It's a bucket list thing. Walking across a frozen lake on a moonlit night under a billion stars. Then back to the cozy cottage with the wood stove and a mug of hot chocolate and a soft blanket. The stuff romance movies are made of. However, before you head to your waterfront cottage, do bear in mind that you can't just walk on any ice-covered lake unless you know it's safe.

Just remember there is no such thing as 100% safe ice. Keep safe by following these rules:

- Watch for markers showing ice has been checked and is safe to walk on
- Never walk or drive on cloudy ice
- Only go on clear, thick ice
- Spring ice is NEVER safe
- Ice thickness is never consistent – it may be flat on top, but is not on the bottom
- Snow on ice acts as an insulator – it makes ice warmer and weaker
- Extreme cold snaps will weaken the ice. Keep an eye on the weather
- Ice formed over running water (rivers & streams) is more dangerous than ice formed over standing water (lakes & ponds)
- Don't go out alone on the ice and always let someone know where you are....make sure your phone is charged!



"No ice is safe ice and always be prepared when venturing out," Ontario Provincial Police