

The Dangers of River Ice

Recent sightings of individuals near and around the river have caused the Olean Fire Department issue this advisory:

River ice is very dangerous and should never be trusted to support the weight of a human. Ice thickness in the same area of the river can vary from a foot to a fraction of an inch. Be careful near riverbanks in the winter, as they will be icy and slippery.

While pond ice on Forness Pond may at times support the weight of people, river ice should never be taken for granted. Regardless of the temperatures and the appearance of the ice, underwater currents can cause thin spots to develop

The problem with rivers is that there is always water moving underneath. Regardless of how slow or rapid the river current is, water can be directed from lower depths where the water temperature is warmer, to the surface. Not only is there a problem of thin spots, but once a person falls through, the current of the river could carry them downstream under the ice.

Cold water removes heat from the body 25 times faster than cold air. About 50% of that heat loss occurs through the head. Physical activity such as swimming or other struggling in the water increases heat loss. Survival time can be reduced to minutes. Strong swimmers have died before swimming 100 yards in cold water and in water less than 40 degrees F, victims have died before swimming 100 feet. Exposure of the head and chest to cold water causes sudden increases in heart rate and blood pressure that may result in cardiac arrest. Other responses to cold water immersion result in immediate loss of consciousness and drowning.

Children, especially, may not differentiate between ice on a pond, or river. Because it is okay to skate and play hockey on Forness pond, they may falsely assume that is okay to play on river ice. To be safe and have a great winter, stay off of river ice.