

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Snowmobile Incident Report 2000-2001



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**State of Wisconsin
Department of Natural Resources
Bureau of Law Enforcement**

**2000-2001 Snowmobile Program Report
Summary**

The 2000-2001 Snowmobile Program Report was compiled from the 26 fatal investigations and other data collected during the fiscal year 2000-2001 (a fiscal year runs from July 1 – June 30).

Conservation Wardens investigate all fatal snowmobile incidents and as such, Wisconsin law requires that a conservation warden or law enforcement officer be notified immediately of any snowmobile incident that results in an injury requiring medical treatment by a physician. In addition, the operator(s) involved in these reportable incidents must file a written report with the Department of Natural Resources within 10 days, insofar as they are capable of doing so.

FATAL INCIDENT CAUSES

The leading cause of death was striking a fixed object such as trees/posts. The secondary cause of death was striking another snowmobiler or being struck by a snowmobile. The leading contributing factors were excessive speed and alcohol consumption.

There were 11 (13 the previous year) fatal crashes that investigators could directly identify excessive speed as a contributing factor to the death of the operator/passenger. Of the 11 speed related fatalities, 7 of those who died had consumed alcohol or 63% (77% the previous year) of the speed related victims.

Alcohol was identified as another contributing factor. The law expressly states a person is under the influence of alcohol once their blood alcohol level reaches 0.10. Forty-six percent or 12 of the victims who had known toxicology reports performed, showed they had consumed some alcohol. There were 5 victims that were not able to be determined and 9 victims had no alcohol in their system at the time of death. Of the total number of victims who had consumed alcohol, 67% had a blood alcohol reading of 0.10 or higher. Two of the blood alcohol levels were determined to be 0.20 and above.

WHO WAS INVOLVED

All of the victims were male except one. The victim's ages ranged from 4-67 years, with the average age, 31.5 years. Of the 26 fatal incidents, 21 of the victims were Wisconsin residents while 2 were from Michigan, 1 from Minnesota and 2 were from Illinois. The largest percentage of victims was age 21-29 or 38% (39% the previous year). The second largest age group was tied between age 40-49 and age 16-20, with both showing 15% (30-39 (27%). One child under 16 was killed this reporting period. The majority of the victims had not received formal Snowmobile Safety Training. Of the 26 victims, 22 were known to have been wearing a helmet, and 4 were not known.

WHEN DO THE FATAL INCIDENTS OCCUR

A correlation was observed by reviewing fatality statistics for the past eight years. Inferences can be drawn as to the time of day the incidents occur and day of the week. Not surprising, the majority of the people killed while snowmobiling, were fatally injured on Friday, Saturday or Sunday.

The time that people were most likely to be involved in a deadly incident is between the hours of 8:00 pm - 3:00 am.

FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED

The 2000-2001 snowmobile season was the first time snowmobilers were subject to a statewide nighttime speed limit. The speed limit prohibited operation of a snowmobile at speeds above 50-mph during the hours of darkness. The hours of darkness was defined as 1/2 hour after sunset until 1/2 hour before sunrise. The speed limit was temporary and expired May 2001. As of this report no statewide speed limit is in effect or being considered for 2001-2002 and beyond.

A second consideration is the affects of the weather and snowfall. The 2000-2001 season began in December under optimal conditions statewide. For the first time in years, the southern portion of the state recognized ample snowfalls, which allowed trails to open in early December, much earlier than years past. The amount of time the southern trails stayed open was considerably longer than previous years and many trails stayed open well into February for most counties. Some of the northern counties kept trails open from December until the close of the season at the end of March.

Wisconsin experienced a mid-January thaw, which temporarily closed many trails until temperatures dropped low enough to allow snow to re-accumulate. Sparse snowfalls in February left some trails without substantial snowfall, which would have normally covered icy trail conditions. During January and February, trails in the southern portion of the state continued to degrade without the required snowfall while the north maintained good to fair conditions.

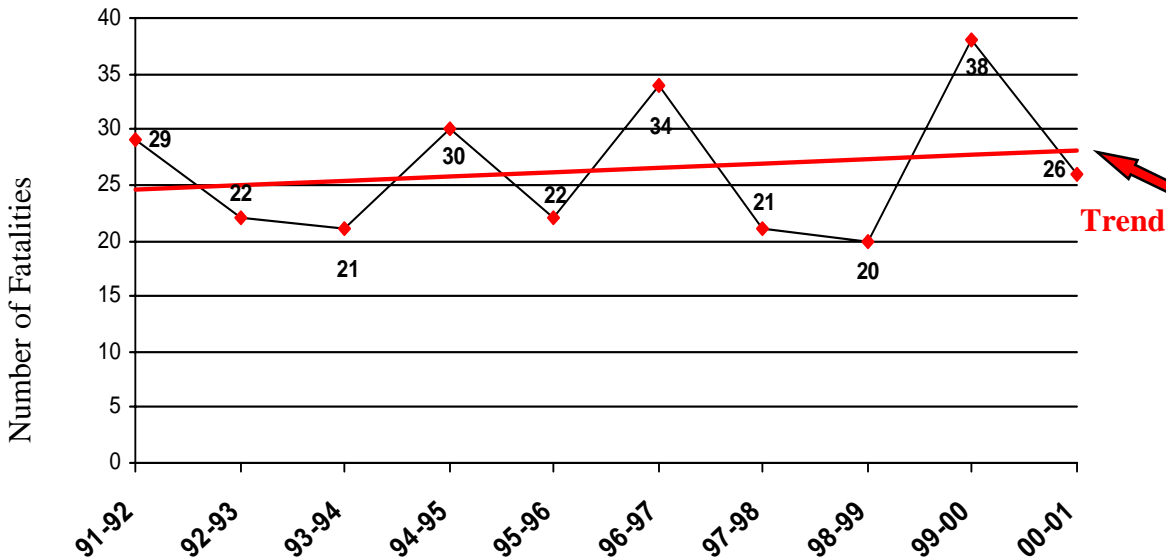
Lake and river freeze-up throughout the state occurred early and may have had an affect on the number of water related snowmobile fatalities. One water-related fatal occurred early in December and two occurred late in March. Abundant snow created a false impression that ice was rideable, however water related fatalities were not highlighted as in the previous year. The Department actively warned snowmobilers about operating on ice throughout the season and a heightened awareness through exhaustive media messages may have prevented a higher number of ice/water related incidents.

National reports concluded that alcohol as a contributing factor for snowmobile deaths was reduced. There is no objective data to conclude the reason for the reduced figures, however officials from an international perspective speculated that the reduction could be developing because of social change.

Wisconsin's 2000-01 reduction in alcohol involved incidents was no different than that of the National trend.

Alcohol Involved Fatal Incidents		
1998-99	1999-00	2000-01
75% Involved	66% Involved	46% Involved

History of Snowmobile Fatalities

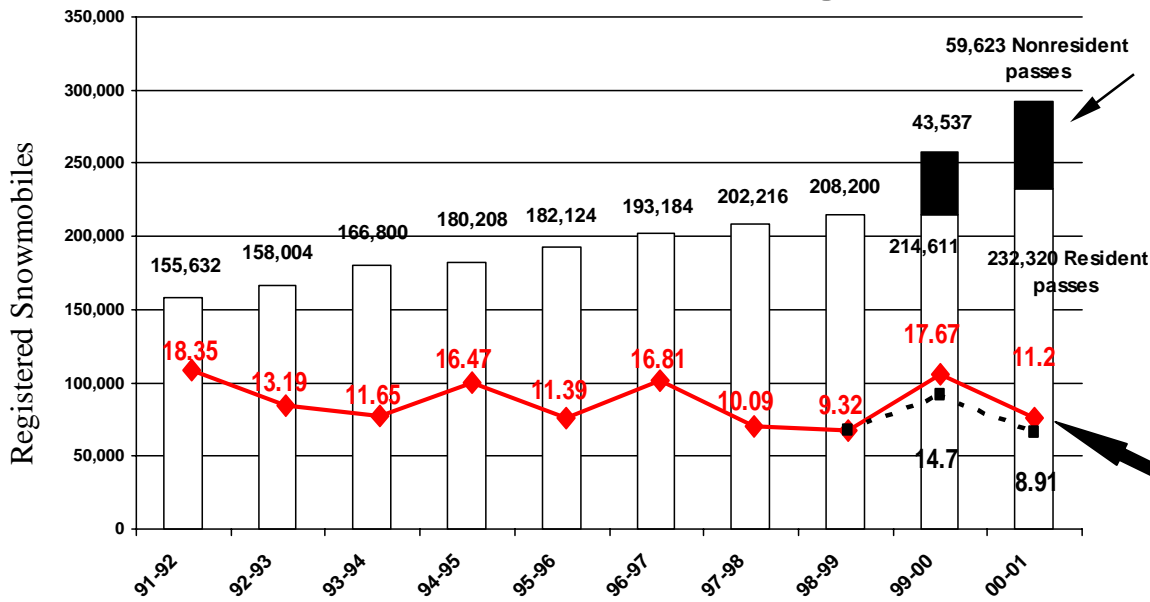


The 10-year fatal average is 26.3 deaths per year.

The amount of snowfall and number of hours ridden, are not reflected and can effect the number of fatals that occur.

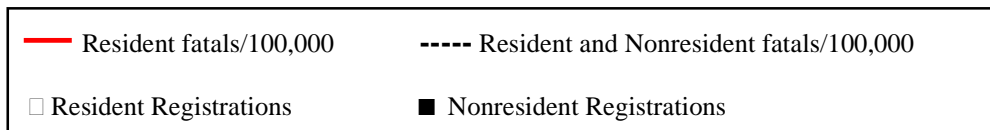
Beginning the 1999-2000 season, the nonresident trail pass became a requirement for all snowmobiles not registered in WI. The Department was able to identify the number nonresident snowmobiles.

Snowmobile Fatality Rate to Number of Snowmobiles Registered

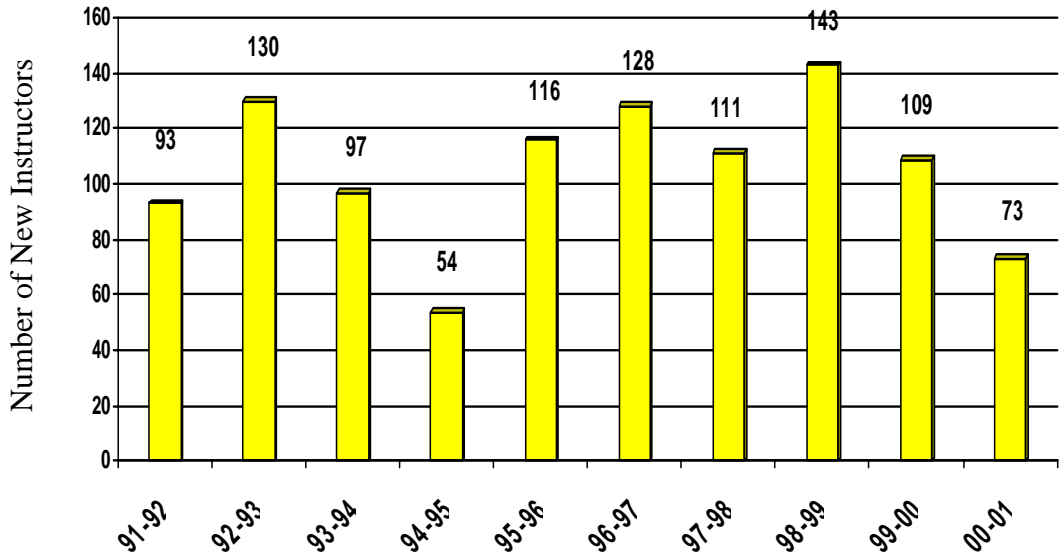


A statewide nighttime speed limit of 50-mph was adopted in December 2000 and lasted for 150 days.

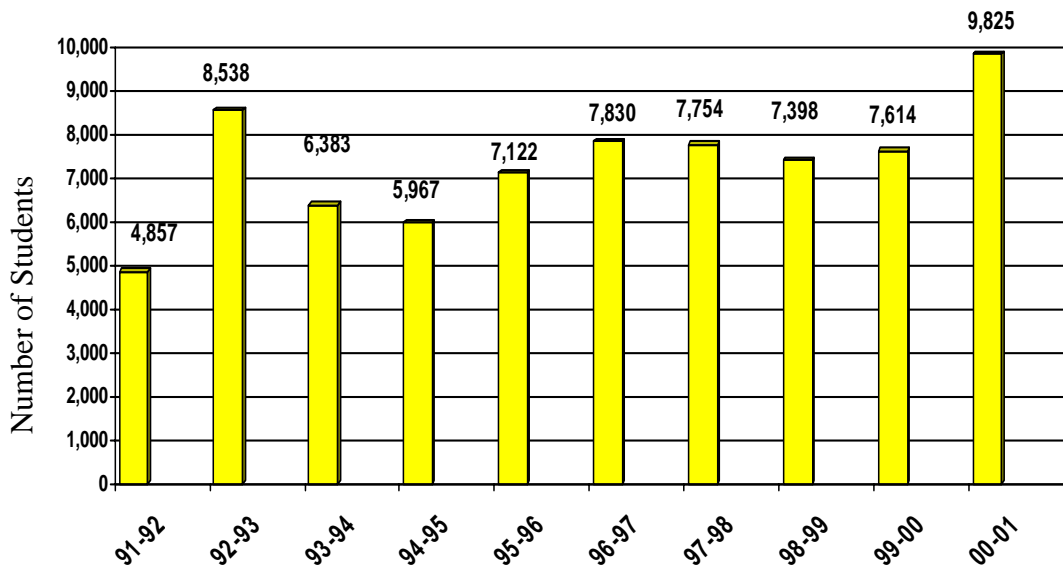
Fatals per 100,000 Registrations.



History of Snowmobile Education Instructors Certified



History of Snowmobile Education Students Certified

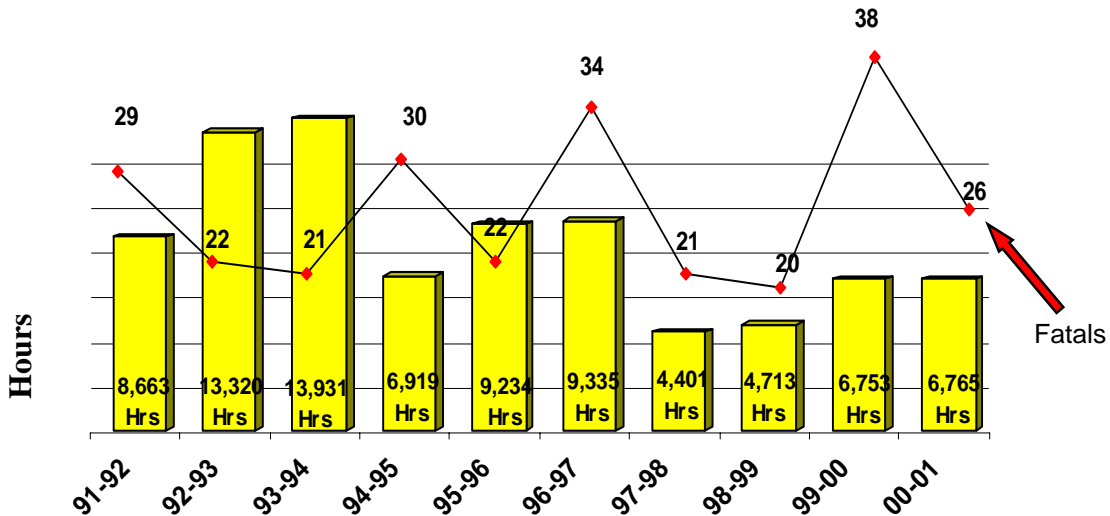


The total number of active instructors statewide for 2000-2001 was 1,230.

Over 198,638 students have been certified by instructors since certification became required of youth, October 1, 1973.

Beginning January 1, 2001 all persons born after January 1, 1985 were required to be certified before operating a snowmobile.

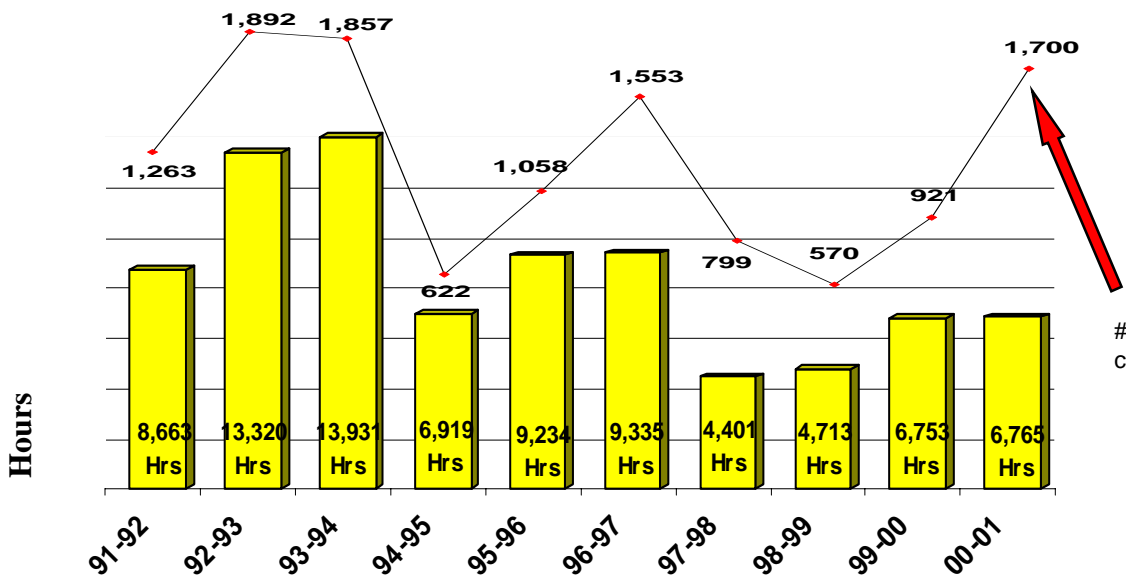
History of Snowmobile Fatality Rate to Enforcement Hours



The enforcement hours were further broken down in 1999-2000 and became more representative of the actual enforcement hours used.

Beginning 1999-2000, enforcement hours no longer included time involved with court, snowmobile maintenance, etc.

History of Snowmobile Citation Rate to Warden Enforcement Hours

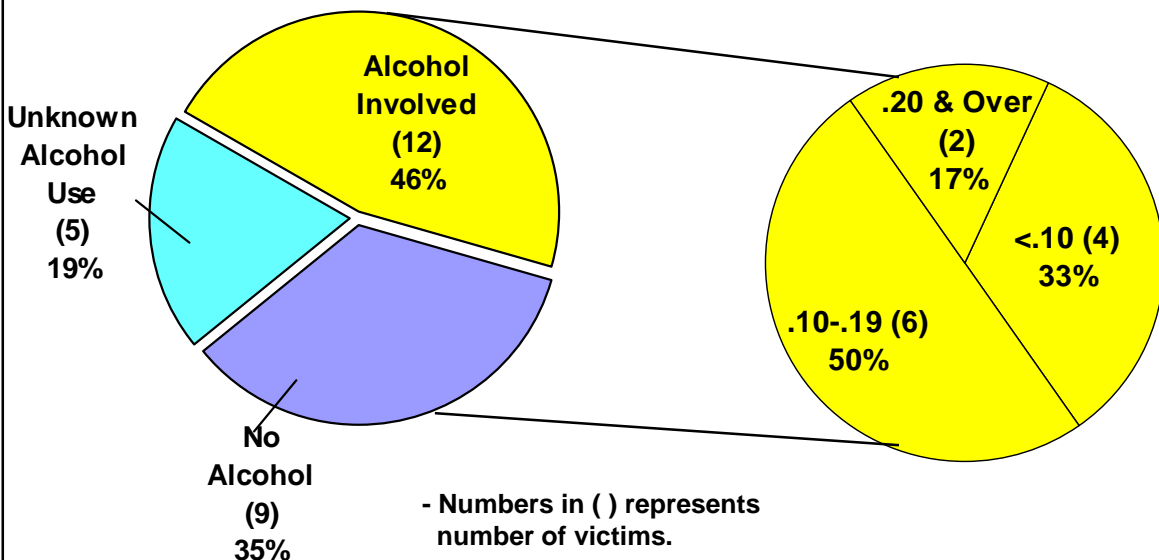


The citations for sheriff patrols and wardens were combined for the first time 2000-2001.

Prior to 2000-2001, the citations listed are for wardens only.

Snowmobile citations issued

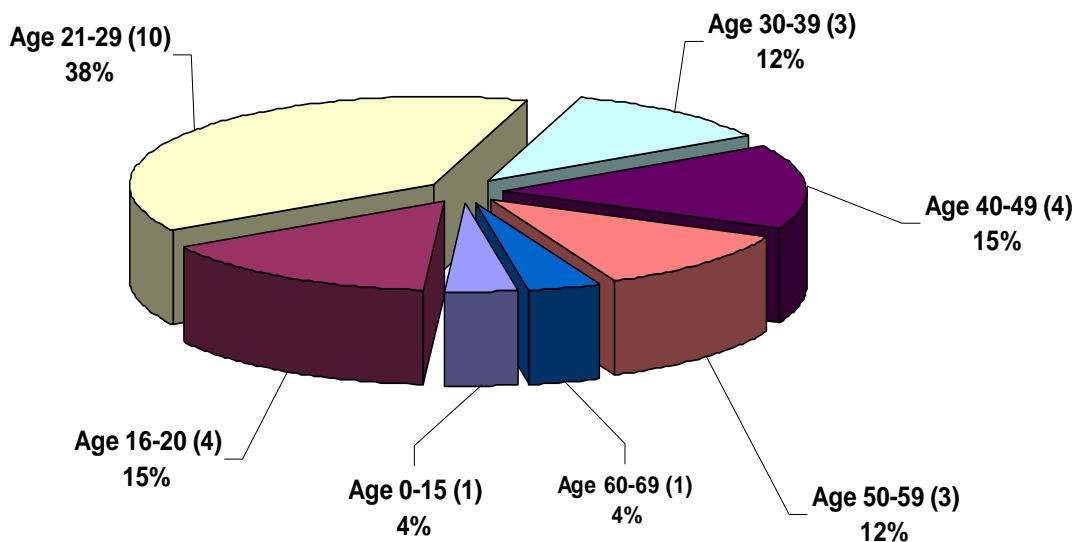
2000-2001 Alcohol Involved Snowmobile Fatalities



- Numbers in () represents number of victims.

- Blood alcohol content is grams /ml.

2000-2001 Age of Snowmobile Fatality Victims



The previous ten-year average blood alcohol level was 0.156.

2000-2001 Blood alcohol level dropped to 0.113.

Past years show that alcohol was a contributing factor in 75% of the fatalities..

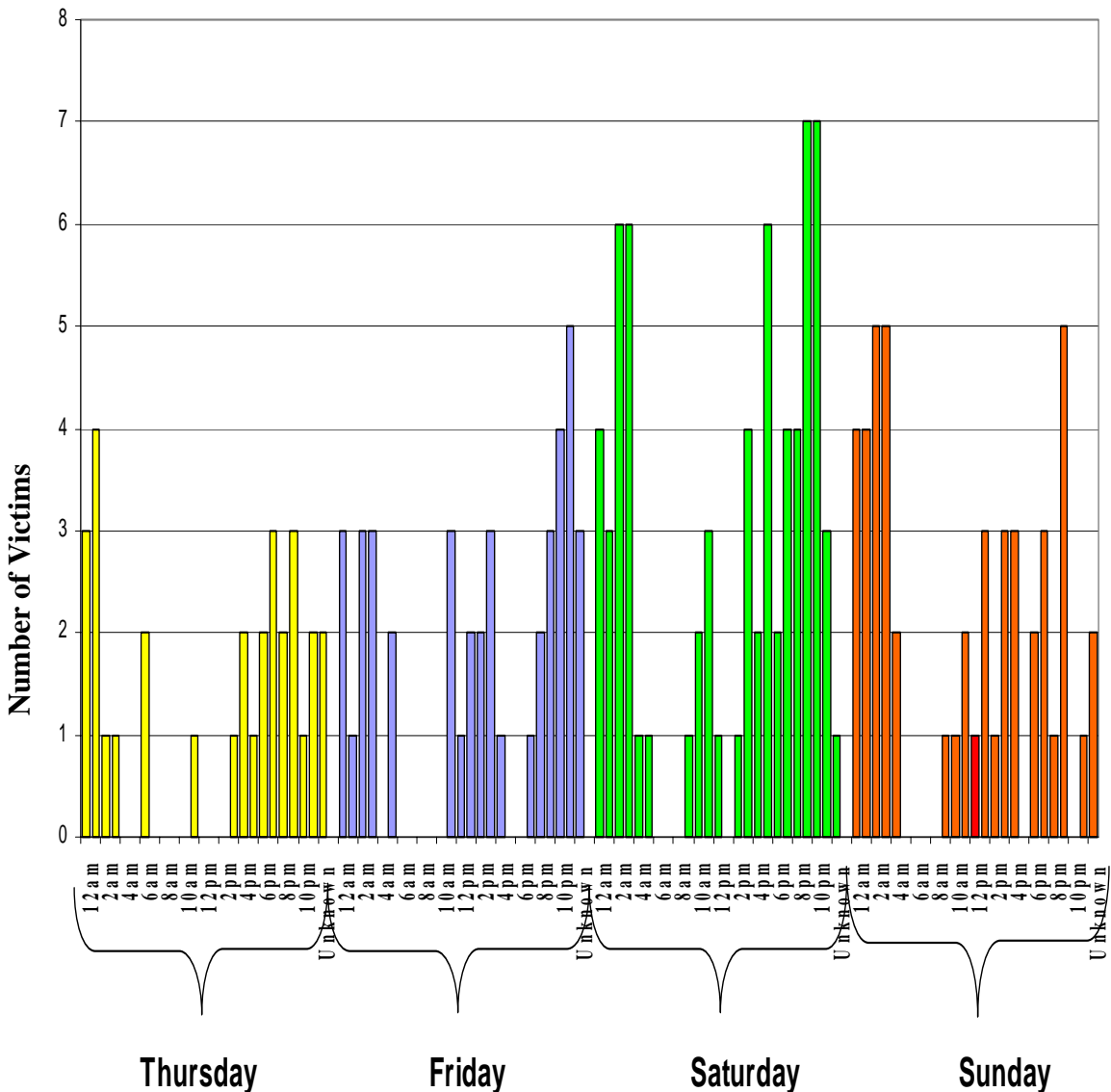
The 2000-2001 season showed that alcohol was a contributing factor in 46% of the fatalities.

The average age for the victims killed was 31.5 years old as compared to 34 years in 1999-2000.

Wisconsin Snowmobile

Fatal Incidents by Time of Day

on Weekends, 1992-1993 to 2000-2001

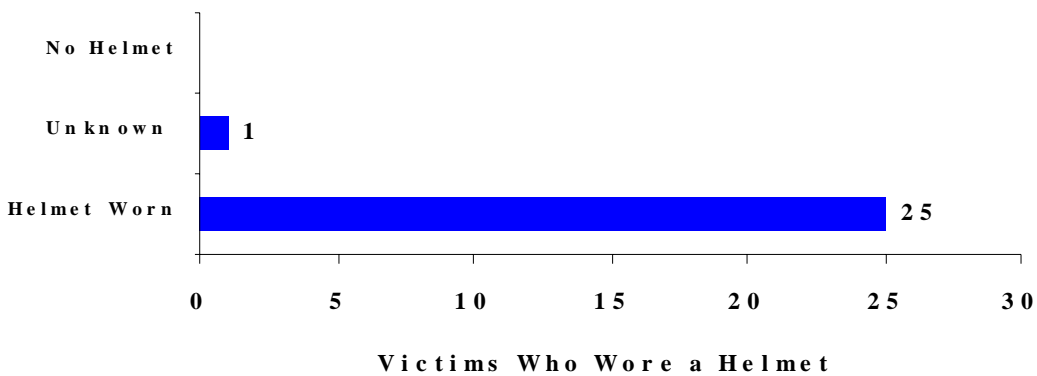


Fatal incidents have the highest frequency of occurrence on Saturdays.

The early morning hours generally involve single operator incidents.

2000-2001 Fatal Snowmobile Victims

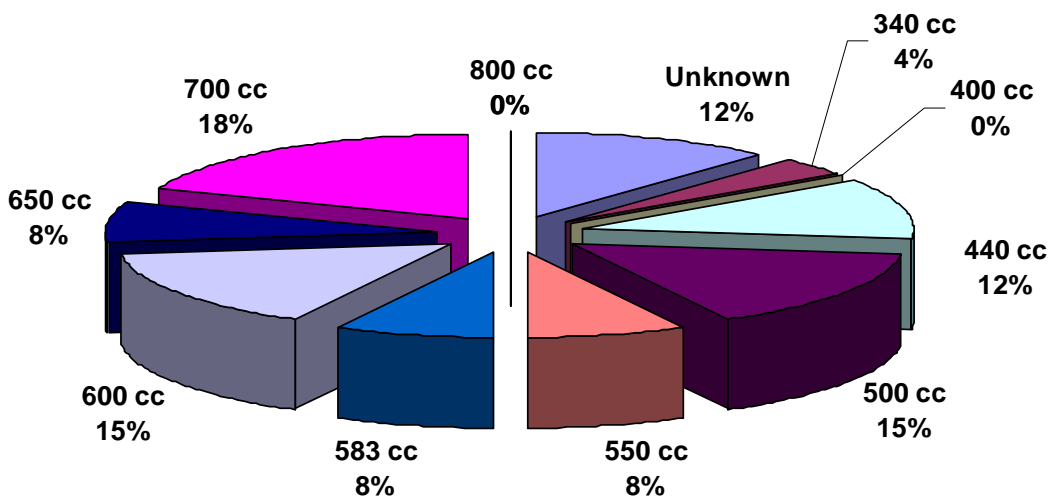
Who Were Wearing Helmets



Victims traditionally wear helmets.

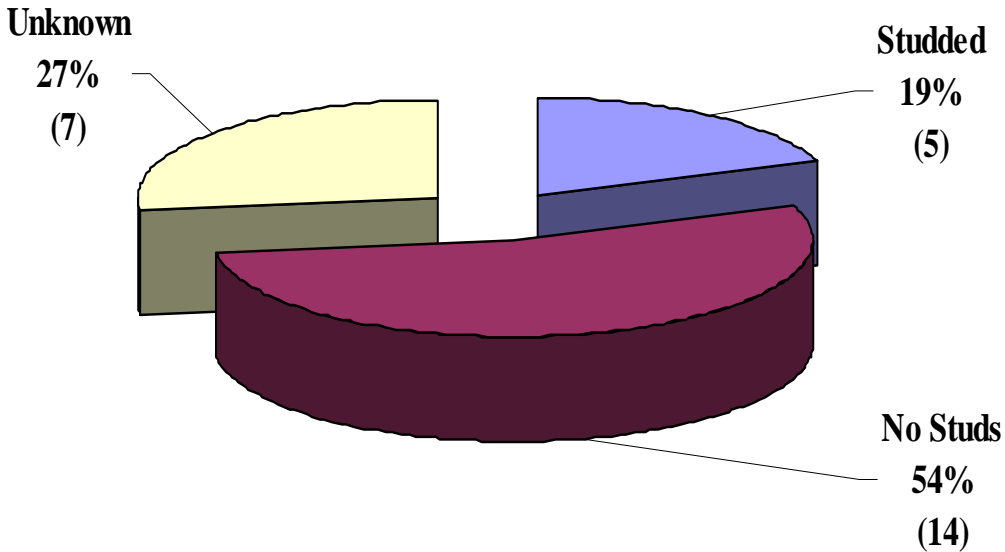
Unknown helmet use is because the victim was missing (drowned) or the helmet was not on the victim at the time of discovery.

2000-2001 Size of Engine Displacement Involved in Fatal Snowmobile Incidents



Historically, the 500 cc engine-powered snowmobile has made up the greatest number of snowmobiles involved in fatal incidents.

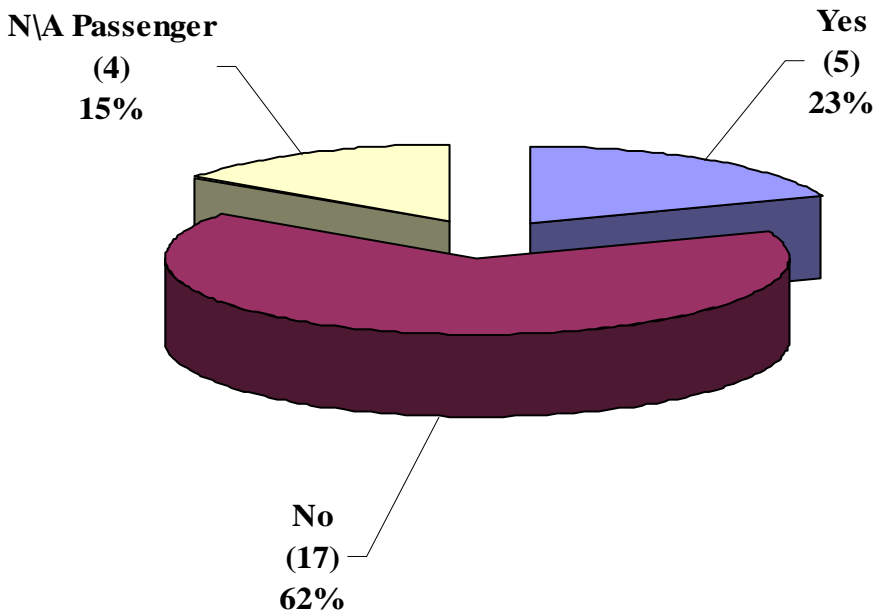
2000-2001 Snowmobiles Involved in FATALS Equipped with Studded Tracks



Most fatal incidents do not involve machines that are equipped with studded tracks.

Studded track information does not include a comparison to the general snowmobile population and overall stud use.

2000-2001 Fatal Snowmobile Victim Operators with Wisconsin DNR Safety Training Certification



Beginning January 1, 2001 - A Snowmobile Safety Certificate became required for all operators born after January 1, 1985.

2000-2001 Citations Issued for Snowmobile Violations

Total Citations	1,700
Operate Snowmobile w/o Valid Registration (S-1)	177
Fail to or Improper Display of Registration Number or Decal (S-2).....	157
Operate Snowmobile w/o Possession of Valid Certificate (S-3)	83
Fail to Transfer Registration of Snowmobile (S-4).....	18
Give Permission to Operate a Snowmobile not Registered (S-5).....	37
Transport Uncased Strung Bow on a Snowmobile (S-09).....	1
Shoot From a Snowmobile (S-10)	2
Operate in Prohibited Area on Lands Controlled by DNR (S-11)	8
Highway and Roadway Violations (S-12)	220
Equipment Violation (S-14).....	3
Permit Operation by Person Incapable Because of Age, Physical or Mental Disability (S-15).....	22
Fail to Report Snowmobile Accident (S-16).....	8
Operate at/in Unreasonable, Improper or Careless Speed/manner (S-17)	110
Fail to Display Lights when Required (S-18)	1
Trespass 'Sec. 350.10(6) through (13) Wis. Stats.' (S-19)	82
Miscellaneous (S-20)	3
Dealer Failing to Collect Fee & Submit Registration Applications (S-21).....	1
Fail to Stop for Law Enforcement Officer (S-22).....	7
Fail to Render Aid (S-23).....	1
Operate Snowmobile while Intoxicated (S-24).....	93
Operate Snowmobile with Alcohol Concentration Above .1% (S-25)	75
Refuse to Take Intoxicated Snowmobile Test (S-26)	6
Absolute Sobriety for Persons Under 19 (S-27)	1
Operate Snowmobile that Makes Excessive or Unusual Noise (S-28)	167
Operate Snowmobile w/o Muffler on Engine (S-29)	0
Cause Injury by Intoxicated Operation of Snowmobile (S-30).....	0
Operate w/o Trail Use Sticker (S-33)	211
Operate (Manufacture or Seller) Snowmobile w/o Functioning Muffler (S-34)	10
Fail to Comply with Regulatory Signs (S-35).....	192

Change - The Citations for Sheriff Patrols and Conservation Wardens were combined for the first time 2000-2001.

Wisconsin Snowmobile Fatality Summary - 2000-2001 Season

Incident #	Date Time	Location	Type Cause	Age Sex	BAC Residency
1.	12-10-00 16:46	Milwaukee River Ozaukee County (Lake)	Fell through ice Drowning Alcohol/speed	24 Male	0.210 WI
Victim fell through ice while operating a snowmobile.					
2.	12-23-00 17:30	Catfish lake Vilas County (Lake)	Struck by another snowmobile Head, neck chest trauma Speed/vision	45 Male	0.026 WI
Victim was thrown from the machine onto the snowmobile trail and was hit by a following snowmobile.					
3.	12-26-00 13:10	Town of Hartland Shawano County (Public trail)	Collision w/ fixed object and another snowmobile Chest trauma Speed/inexperience	21 M	0.00 WI
Victim hit a stop sign and another snowmobile.					
4.	12-26-00 23:00	Town of Cooks Chippewa County (Public trail)	Struck by another snowmobile Head trauma Follow too close/speed	19 Male	0.00 WI
Victim passenger fell off the snowmobile and was struck by a following machine.					
5.	12-31-00 18:25	Town of Colby Clark County (Private land)	Struck by following snowmobile Head, neck trauma Speed/alcohol	39 Male	0.025 WI
Victim's snowmobile broke down. The victim then became a passenger on another snowmobile and fell off after hitting a bump. The victim was struck by following snowmobile.					
6.	01-01-01 13:45	Town of Tomah Monroe County (Public road)	Struck by automobile Massive body trauma Operate on road/fail to yield	24 Male	0.00 WI
Snowmobile was being operated on wrong side of road facing oncoming traffic. When the snowmobile started to cross road, the snowmobile was struck by truck.					
7.	01-14-01 12:30	Town of King Lincoln County (Hwy. right of way)	Struck by automobile Massive body trauma Operate on road/fail to yield	56 Male	0.151 IL
Victim was struck in ditch along roadside. While the snowmobile was being pushed, the track of the snowmobile suddenly caught, projecting the snowmobile out onto county road. An oncoming automobile struck the snowmobile & operator.					
8.	01-20-01 16:15	Town of Ripon Fond du Lac County (Public trail)	Struck a tree Head trauma Unfamiliar with area/speed	30 Male	0.00 WI
Victim was the 4th snowmobile in a group of four. The victim missed a right-hand turn, left the trail and struck a tree.					

Incident #	Date Time	Location	Type Cause	Age Sex	BAC Residency
9.	01-20-01 16:23	Town of New Haven Adams County (Public trail)	Struck a Tree Head, neck trauma Speed/alcohol	40 Male	0.164 IL

Victim was operating on public snowmobile trail lost control of his snowmobile and hit trees.

10.	01-20-01 18:30	Connors Lake Sawyer County (Public trail)	Struck a tree Massive body trauma Alcohol/speed	44 Male	0.122 WI
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Victim was riding near a lake, left the trail and hit a tree.

11.	01-24-01 20:45	Town of Cooks Chippewa County (Private trail)	Struck by another snowmobile Neck, chest trauma Speed	28 Male	0.029 WI
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Two snowmobiles were operating on a private trail approaching the crest of a hill in opposite directions. The two snowmobiles collided at the crest of the hill. The operator and passenger (victim 12) were on the same snowmobile.

12.	01-24-01 20:45	Town of Cooks Chippewa County (Private trail)	Struck by another snowmobile Neck, chest trauma Speed	4 Female	N/A WI
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Two snowmobiles were operating on a private trail approaching the crest of a hill in opposite directions. The two snowmobiles collided at the crest of the hill. The operator (victim 11) and passenger were on the same snowmobile.

13.	01-29-01 13:45	Town of Baldwin St. Croix County (Private land)	Hit a rope Head trauma Inattentive driving	18 Male	0.00 WI
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Victim hit rope connected to posts as he was returning home from school on a snowmobile.

14.	02-03-01 17:15	Town of Bashaw Washburn County (Private land)	Struck by another snowmobile Head trauma Speed/careless operation	21 Male	0.00 WI
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Victim and a 2nd snowmobiler were operating on private property. The victim and the 2nd snowmobiler collided head on.

15.	02-03-01 17:56	Town f Richfield Wood County (Private land)	Struck a wire fence C-Spine trauma Speed/alcohol	25 Male	0.108 WI
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Victim was operating snowmobile adjacent to the Hwy. The victim struck a 3-strand smooth wire fence. The victim was struck in the throat and head.

16.	02-07-01 16:46	Town of Pine River Lincoln County (Public trail)	Struck a tree Chest trauma Too fast for conditions/equipment failure	67 Male	0.00 WI
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The victim was southbound on trail where the trail turned to the west. The victim failed to negotiate the 90-degree turn, left the trail and struck a tree, which was 2 feet off of the trail.

Incident #	Date Time	Location	Type Cause	Age Sex	BAC Residency
17.	02-10-01 01:00	Town of Lincoln Forest County (Public trail)	Struck a tree Neck trauma Speed/visibility	23 Male	0.043 WI
Victim failed to negotiate the 90-degree turn, left the trail, and struck a tree.					
18.	02-12-01 23:45	Town of Wolf River Outagamie County (Private land)	Snowmobile overturned Head trauma Alcohol/speed	23 Male	0.120 WI
Victim left the trail and proceeded into & through a ditch line. After striking brush and branches in the ditch, the victim's snowmobile flipped over throwing victim off.					
19.	01-19-01 13:10	Town of Siren Burnett County (Public road)	Struck by automobile Internal trauma Fail to yield	20 M	N/A WI
Victim was struck by a truck while crossing a Hwy. and received multiple injuries. The victim was placed on life support until 02-13-01.					
20.	02-18-01 00:05	Town of Matteson Waupaca County (Public trail)	Struck a tree Head, neck chest trauma Alcohol/speed	34 M	0.156 WI
Victim was in a party of 8 snowmobiles touring the trails when the victim failed to negotiate a 90-degree turn. The victim's snowmobile hit a hard snow berm, sending victim airborne off the snowmobile, where he struck a tree.					
21.	02-21-01 14:40	Town of Stratford Marathon County (Public trail)	Struck a tree Head, chest trauma Speed/change in trail condition	25 M	0.00 WI
Victim's snowmobile hit a snowdrift, became airborne striking the trail. The victim was ejected from the machine and struck a tree.					
22.	02-23-01 15:00	Town of Plainfield Waushara County (Public road)	Struck by Automobile Internal trauma Fail to yield	52 M	0.00 WI
Victim was hit by pickup truck while crossing a road.					
23.	02-17-01 11:50	Town of Washburn Bayfield County (Public trail)	Collision w/another snowmobile Internal trauma Fail to yield/speed	16 Male	N/A MN
Victim and another snowmobile collided on a public trail (forest road). The victim passed away 02-23-01.					
24.	02-24-01 0018	Town of Lakewood Oconto County (Public road)	Struck a tree Head trauma Speed/alcohol	24 Male	N/A WI
Victim was operating on a road not designated as a route and failed to negotiate a curve. The victim became airborne striking a tree.					

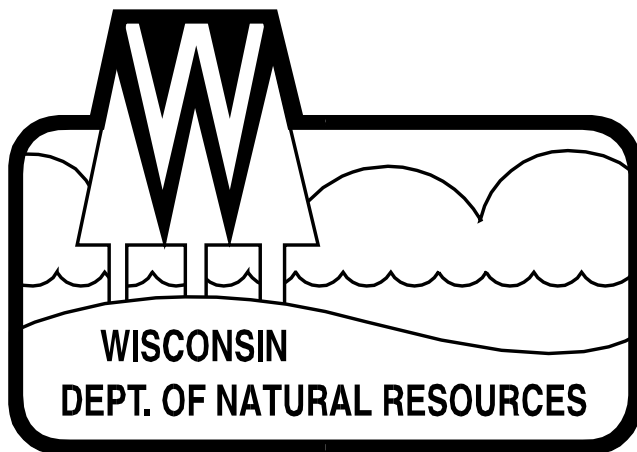
Incident #	Date Time	Location	Type Cause	Age Sex	BAC Residency
25.	03-15-01 00:30	Green Bay Marinette County (Lake)	Fell through ice Drowning Visibility/alcohol	43 Male	0.212 MI

Four males on 4 separate snowmobiles were traveling to Menominee MI, from Sturgeon Bay and became disoriented due to fog. Two of the riders went through the ice and were rescued by companions. The four men then road double on the two remaining snowmobiles. As they continued to find their way, the victim operator and his passenger (victim #26) rode onto very thin ice and were lost in the water. The victim operator was recovered on 3-18-01.

26.	03-15-01 00:30	Green Bay Marinette County (Lake)	Fell through ice Drowning Visibility/alcohol	55 Male	Unknown MI
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Four males on 4 separate snowmobiles were traveling to Menominee MI, from Sturgeon Bay and became disoriented due to fog. Two of the riders went through the ice and were rescued by companions. The four men then road double on the two remaining snowmobiles. As they continued to find their way, the operator (victim#25) and victim (passenger) rode onto very thin ice, both men were lost in the water. The victim (passenger) is still missing.

SLOW DOWN
...RIDE SOBER...
&
RIDE FOR LIFE



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