

December - Week 2

Lake Freeze Up

Lake ice-in typically occurs in the first weeks of December. Ice-in happens when lakes freeze up as the water on top of the lake freezes and forms a layer of ice. Ice fishermen, ice skaters, and pond hockey players look forward to this time of year as lake ice forms on Minnesota lakes and ponds. An ice-covered lake does not signal that it is safe to venture onto the ice. A thickness of 4 inches is necessary to support a person for walking, skating, or fishing. A thickness of about 12 inches is needed before a car, truck, or fish house can be moved onto the ice.

This week venture to a local lake or pond and observe safely from shore. Is the lake covered with ice? If not, is ice forming small shelves along the shoreline? How is the weather impacting ice formation? Is it windy or calm, sunny or cloudy, above or below freezing?

If there is ice on the lake, how thick do you think it is? You can test the thickness while staying on shore. Pick up some small rocks and throw them up in the air so they land on the ice. What happens? Does the ice crack? If it cracks, can you see “spider web” patterns? Do the rocks go through the ice?

If there is no ice on the lake or pond, pick up some rocks and take part in late fall/early winter rock-skipping. If ice-in has not occurred yet, predict when it will happen and check back periodically to see when it occurs this year. Repeat your observations in following years to record this data and develop a data set that provides you with the average ice-in date for your local lake or pond.

