

POLICY: ICE/WATER RESCUE

Hadley Township Fire Department
Policy #115

I. PURPOSE

This guideline is intended to establish safe practices for surface ice/water rescue emergency operations.

II. SCOPE

This guideline supercedes all previous documents concerning the same subject matter and becomes effective immediately.

III. GENERAL

A. Pre-Arrival Considerations

Ice/water rescue is inherently dangerous. Extra on-scene precautions and discipline is required to ensure the safety of all departmental personnel and the safety of victims.

1. Have the nearest mutual aid Fire department that performs ice rescue dispatched. If dispatch information indicates the need for additional resources, activate the Lapeer County sheriff dive team.
2. All department apparatus needs to respond to supply extra equipment such as ladders, ropes, pike poles, etc.
3. Find out how many people in the water. Request additional resources as necessary.
4. Stage all unnecessary personnel and noise away from the immediate scene to aide verbal communications.

B. Before Attempting Rescue

The inherent dangers of ice/water rescue operations require planning before action.

1. Do not leave the shore or enter the ice or open water without a personal rescue flotation device or a departmentally approved ice rescue suit/rescue vest-helmet.
2. (ICE) Look at the mechanism that broke the ice, this will tell you the condition of the ice and its thickness.
3. Always mark the victim's entry point or point last seen with objects on shore. Mark the victim even if visible because they may disappear. Activate Survival Flight in the event of a drowning.
4. Fire and medical personnel not directly involved with victim retrieval should coordinate patient and rescuer handling and treatment. This needs to be done well in advance of their arrival to the shore. All clothing must be removed and replaced with dry blankets, turn out gear, etcetera. Medical personnel must evaluate all rescuers who have worn an ice rescue suit/rescue vest-helmet.
5. Any additional personnel should bring the following to the shore line:
 - a. Personal flotation devices/rescue lifejackets
 - b. Stokes baskets
 - c. Blankets

- d. Medical equipment
- e. Extra rope
- f. Pike poles
- g. Small boats readily available along shore.

6. During night operations, keep lights off to the side. Don't blind rescuers!

C. Rescuer Positioning

1. ***All rescuers must be tied off to shore.*** The first suited rescuer out will ultimately attempt to retrieve the victim. This rescuer cannot advance onto the ice or open water until a second suited rescuer is ready.
2. (ICE) The second suited rescuer will advance approximately half way out and be ready to assist the first rescuer and assist in communication.
3. (OPEN WATER) Rescuers equipped with rescue vest-helmets may all attend patient(s) and attempt to backboard and secure in water.
4. The third and forth suited rescuers will remain on land and act as a R.I.T.

D. Victim Retrieval

1. Prioritize the victims by determining which victim is in the most trouble.
2. Due to hypothermia the victim's motor skills will deteriorate rapidly.
3. Communicate with victim to calm them down.
4. Always crawl on the ice, this will distribute your weight and help to avoid additional ice breakage, and slip and fall injuries.
5. Only enter the water as a last resort. If it becomes necessary to enter the water you must slide in, do not jump.
6. Approach victims from the side or behind to avoid breaking the ice that they are holding onto.
7. Do not make the hole through the ice any larger than necessary.
8. The following signals are the nationally recognized ice/water rescue hand signals. These are the only signals that will be used.
 - a. Stop - Arm straight up above head with palm open and fingers vertical.
 - b. Take up slack – Arm straight up above head with closed fist.
 - c. Pull me in – Elbow elevated above shoulder, fingertips tap on top of head.
9. Do not go out onto or return to the ice/water retrieve equipment, fishing poles, snowmobile, watercraft, ice shanty, etcetera without permission from the officer in charge.