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## PRESS RELEASE

**For More Information:**

**ELLEN G. DUYSSEN**

**Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health**

University of Nebraska Medical Center

College of Public Health, Room 3035

984388 Nebraska Medical Center

Omaha, NE 68198-4388

402.552.3394

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### WHITE POWDER RIDES

***Make 'em fast, make 'em safe!***

Sleek, fast snowmobiles have been turning cold and snowy country sides into an exciting and adventurous winter wonderland for nearly 90 years.

It was in 1927 that Wisconsin's Carl Eliason patented the feature of his motorized toboggan which defined the first workable, single-track, one-passenger snowmobile. For 31 years he continued to refine the "Eliason Motor Toboggan." In 1937, Eliason's first competitor, J. Armand Bombardier, patented a tracked vehicle intended for traveling over snow.

Another snowmobile design, the "iron dog," was produced in the 1940s and J. Armand Bombardier introduced the Ski-Doo snowmobile in 1959. Today's snowmobiles are made with light, highly durable materials. They are also more fuel-efficient and much faster, increasing the risk of snowmobile accidents.

ATV/Snowmobile Administrator-Bureau of Law Enforcement, Gary Eddy, of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), says snowmobile safety is a top priority in his state, involving a minimum 6-hour course to obtain a snowmobile safety certificate.

“Many times there’s a perception that if you can drive a car you can drive a snowmobile,” Eddy says. “But snowmobiles are very unique machines with unique controls and these machines behave quite differently than any other off-road motorized vehicle.”

Snowmobiles are designed with skis on the front that are used for steering the machine. A rubberized track at the back of the machine propels it forward. As if that unique design isn’t enough of a challenge in controlling a snowmobile’s behavior, varying snow conditions can cause snowmobiles to behave in different ways, too.

“Steering a snowmobile on icy, hard packed snow is different than steering it in either heavy wet snow or powdery snow,” Eddy says. “There’s a wide variety of skills necessary to safely operating a snowmobile in these different conditions.”

When Wisconsin snowmobilers complete a safety training course, they’re advised of the body weight adjustments that will affect how a snowmobile moves. Learning how to use bodyweight to make turns easier is also explained during the training course.

“Our training emphasizes the need for snowmobilers to operate their machine within their own personal experience and comfort level,” Eddy says. A proper safe braking distance is going to depend on snow conditions and wide open terrain is the safest and easiest type of area for beginners to start learning how to operate their snowmobile.”

Winding, twisting trails may provide scenic views on a snowmobile ride, but they also increase the risk of crashing into an unseen snowmobile around a sharp corner or missing a turn and colliding with a tree or other object. Regardless of the terrain selection, snowmobilers need a thorough understanding of the laws in the state where they're riding.

"Speed restrictions and operator age restrictions are common to most states," Eddy says. "In some states, certain age categories are required to complete safety certification training before they ride."

Because modern snowmobiles can quickly reach high speeds, riders are encouraged to use caution on each ride since snow conditions play a significant role in how quickly a snowmobile moves.

"It's pretty easy to give too much throttle," Eddy says. "In ideal snow conditions, snowmobiles will quickly pick up speed and may catch inexperienced riders off guard. If a rider panics and then freezes due to unexpected behavior of their machine, a serious accident can occur quickly."

Since many snowmobile activities take place during vacation times, riders may become too lax in observing safety guidelines and avoiding alcohol during a ride. While alcohol should not be used when operating any motor vehicle, snowy and icy snowmobile trails require peak alertness and ability to respond to an unexpected event.

"In Wisconsin we promote the Zero Alcohol motto for snowmobilers," Eddy says. "That same approach is used by the International Association of Snowmobile Administrators. In our state, on average, at least 50% of our annual fatalities involve alcohol."

In some states, only youth are required to complete snowmobile operation training. Other states require training for an age range which includes some adults. Today's snowmobiles not only go fast more quickly, improved suspension makes the ride smoother.

"That means operators may not recognize how rough the terrain they're riding across is," Eddy says. "Today's trail grooming equipment is also very effective, which means riders may not realize they are operating at speeds beyond their comfort, capabilities or experience. This could endanger their safety and the safety of others."

Eddy recommends that snowmobile riders carefully study their state snowmobile laws in order to remain safe during rides. Taking advantage of training resources will further understanding of safety practices and provide opportunity to use the practices in a controlled and supervised environment.

"Implementing state safety practices are a recipe for a successful snowmobile ride," Eddy says. "Trail maps are readily available and apps for Smartphones are widely available, too. GPS units are also very helpful."

After selecting a responsible snowmobile group to ride with, riders new to snowmobiling are encouraged to ride in the middle of the pack with every rider operating at a speed that's comfortable for newest and inexperienced riders. It's also recommended that snowmobilers avoid riding alone, relying on the buddy system to help them remain safe.

"Another good practice is developing a written plan for any ride and leaving that information with someone who can monitor whether or not the ride begins and ends as planned," Eddy says. "Stick with that plan, too, so if something does happen

someone knows where to look for you and how long you've been gone.”

Dressing appropriately for weather conditions and avoiding riding in adverse weather such as snowstorms are additional safety precautions.

“Going out when visibility is poor could mean you put emergency responders in danger if they have to search for you,” Eddy says. “Before starting any ride, make sure your snowmobile is in good working condition by checking necessary fluids and ensuring spare equipment such as belts and spark plugs are stocked on the machine.

“Maintaining a basic first aid kit on the snowmobile is also a key safety practice,” Eddy says. “Our training programs aren't intended to make anyone a snowmobile expert, but they provide a safety practices foundation that riders can build on.”

The Safe Riders! Program is a snowmobile safety awareness program that provides basic essentials about snowmobile safety. The information, produced through a partnership between the American Council of Snowmobile Associations (ACSA), the International Association of Snowmobile Administrators and the International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association (ISMA) with financial assistance from the Recreational Trails Program administered by the U.S. Department of Transportation – Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), can be found at <http://www.saferiderssafetyawareness.org>.