

# Riding Reminders For Alaska's **ATV Drivers**



## **ALASKA AND ATVS**

### **PROTECTIVE CLOTHING**

### **TOOLS, SUPPLIES, AND PRECAUTIONS**

### **HAZARDS ON THE TRAIL**

### **REGISTRATION AND ALASKA'S LAW**

### **RESPONSIBILITY**

### **ATVS, ALCOHOL, AND DRUGS**

### **ATV SAFE RIDING TIPS**

### **ATV RIDER SELF-TEST**

## **ALASKA AND ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLES**

In recent years, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), both 3-wheel and 4-wheel, have risen in popularity in Alaska. In fact, Alaska probably has the highest per capita use of ATVs of any state in the Union.

The popularity of ATVs is mainly due to their versatility. Alaskans use ATVs for work, basic transportation, and recreation. They are sometimes the only practical means of access to remote, roadless areas, making life in those places a little easier. For those whose livelihoods depend on fishing and hunting, they have become an extremely valuable too. ATVs have also contributed to faster and more efficient emergency medical response. For others, these off-road vehicles simply offer a bit of fun and recreation that might not otherwise be available.

But their increase in popularity has brought about a need for more information on safe riding practices to help prevent the rising number of injuries and deaths associated with ATV use in Alaska. This publication will focus on safe riding practices such as proper riding apparel, emergency tools, and supplies. The laws surrounding the use of off-road vehicles in Alaska, which apply to both ATVs and snowmobiles, and hazards riders might encounter on the trail will be covered as well. The "Self-Test", at the end, offers you a chance to evaluate your knowledge of ATVs in Alaska.

This publication is not intended to be a resource on how to drive or operate an ATV. Please contact your dealership or refer to your owner's manual for more information on proper driving techniques and instruction.

Whether you use an ATV for work or for play, this publication will offer suggestions to make every ride safe and enjoyable.



**A publication prepared by the Alaska State Troopers  
Public Information Office.**

## PROTECTIVE CLOTHING

In comparison with automobiles, ATVs offer their drivers very little protection. An automobile driver, who sits encased in a steel compartment, can withstand many accidents that would injure or kill someone on an ATV. Still, there are many ways an ATV driver can protect himself against serious injury or even death. The first way is the manner in which he dresses.

Listed below are recommendations on how the ATV operator should be outfitted for travel.

**Helmet:** *A helmet is the single most important piece of personal protection an ATV rider can wear.* You should wear one every time you ride. Encourage friends and family to wear helmets as well. Large numbers of injuries and fatalities could be prevented each year by the use of helmets with a snug fitting chinstrap. If you ride frequently after dark, strips of reflective tape on the helmet add extra protection by increasing visibility. Not only do helmets offer protection from collision, tree branches, and falls, they provide warmth and some protection from noise.

A head injury resulting from an ATV crash is a serious matter. Over a two-year period, at least 20 deaths and 583 injuries, including six persons permanently disabled by neurological injuries, were associated with ATVs in Alaska alone. Half of the fatalities were a result of direct impact to the head.

Here are a few tips on selecting a helmet. A helmet should fit snugly and have a chinstrap that is securely fastened. Open-faced helmets are lighter and cooler and should be used with face and mouth protection. Be sure the helmet carries a Federal stamp of approval.

**Eye Protection:** An ATV rider must be able to see clearly in order to ride safely. If an object, such as a rock or branch, hits you in the face, it can distract you. However, if an object hits you in the eye, it can blind you. Normal sunglasses or prescription glasses are not sufficient. A face shield or goggles will offer the best protection.

Replace eye protection devices when they become scratched. Goggles or visors with gray or green lenses are preferred for bright days. Amber or yellow lenses are very useful for dark days or late afternoon. These lenses, when used in the proper light, can reveal dangers in the terrain such as depressions in the snow. Colored lenses must be removed at night.

**Protect Your Body:** There are two ways in which an ATV rider must protect his body. The first way is against the climate. The second way is against injuries which may be sustained due to falls or collisions.

In *warm weather*, a long sleeved shirt or jersey and long pants are minimal requirements for rider protection, but they will do little for you if you skid on the ground. Off-road riding gear, such as off-road pants with kneepads, and shoulder pads, provide better protection. A sturdy jacket and pair of pants is another alternative.

## ALASKA AND ATVS

## PROTECTIVE CLOTHING

### TOOLS, SUPPLIES, AND PRECAUTIONS

### HAZARDS ON THE TRAIL

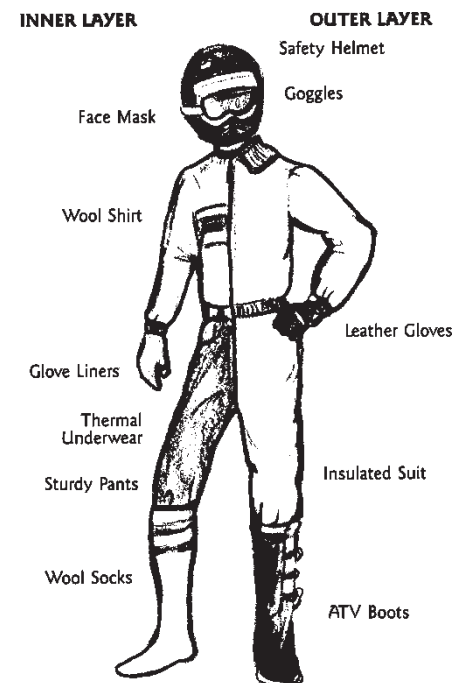
### REGISTRATION AND ALASKA'S LAW

### RESPONSIBILITY

### ATVS, ALCOHOL, AND DRUGS

### ATV SAFE RIDING TIPS

### ATV RIDER SELF-TEST



Keeping your body warm and dry on the *winter* trail is essential for comfort and, more importantly, your health. Although the temperature may indicate pleasant weather, don't forget to take into account the "wind chill factor," which indicates the cooling power of cold air on exposed flesh at different wind speeds or traveling speeds. For example, if the temperature on a calm day is 10 degrees above zero, and you are riding your ATV at 30 miles per hour, the "wind chill" temperature is equivalent to 12 degrees *below* zero.

**Frostbite occurs in 15 minutes or less**

		Temperature (°F)											
		30	25	20	15	10	5	0	-5	-10	-15	-10	-25
Wind (MPH)	5	25	19	13	7	1	-5	-11	-16	-22	-28	-34	-40
	10	21	15	9	3	-4	-10	-16	-22	-28	-35	-41	-47
	15	19	13	6	0	-7	-13	-19	-26	-32	-39	-45	-51
	20	17	11	4	-2	-9	-15	-22	-29	-35	-42	-48	-55
	25	16	9	3	-4	-11	-17	-24	-31	-37	-44	-51	-58
	30	15	8	1	-5	-12	-19	-26	-33	-39	-46	-53	-60
	35	14	7	0	-7	-14	-21	-27	-34	-41	-48	-55	-62
	40	13	6	-1	-8	-15	-22	-29	-36	-43	-50	-57	-64
	45	12	5	-2	-9	-16	-23	-30	-37	-44	-51	-58	-65
	50	12	4	-3	-10	-17	-24	-31	-38	-45	-52	-60	-67
	55	11	4	-3	-11	-18	-25	-32	-39	-46	-54	-61	-68
	60	10	3	-4	-11	-19	-26	-33	-40	-48	-55	-62	-69

Thermal underwear or polypropylene is recommended in cold weather because it provides an insulating layer of dead air between your skin and the next layer of clothing. It will also wick, or draw moisture away from your body. Wear both bottoms and tops. Choose a size that fits snugly because if it stretches too much, it loses its ability to retain heat.

Wear a wool shirt, pants, and sweater when the temperature reflects cooler temperatures.

Depending on the temperature, you may want to add an outer layer, which may mean a parka or a wind suit made of nylon or Gortex. Wearing several layers of clothing will enable you to regulate your body temperature by removing or adding layers of clothing until you are comfortable.

Snowmobile suits are ideal for winter ATV riding. One-piece jumpsuits generally provide the most warmth, but two-piece outfits are warm enough for most occasions. This outer clothing should fit loosely. Reflective strips sewn on the outer garments, or other pieces of reflective clothing, will give you extra visibility during the long, dark winter months.

**Protect Your Feet:** Thermal socks are preferred in the winter. Wear two pair when it is really cold. A light pair of socks under a heavy wool pair works well, but don't put on so many pairs that your feet feel tight in your boots. You need a little movement and a layer of air around your feet for warmth.

Above-the-calf boots with a one-inch heel are recommended year-round for several reasons. First, a low heel will keep your feet from slipping off the pegs. Second, high tops will help prevent twisting of the ankle and also protect the lower leg from burns and lacerations.

## ALASKA AND ATVS

## PROTECTIVE CLOTHING

### TOOLS, SUPPLIES, AND PRECAUTIONS

### HAZARDS ON THE TRAIL

### REGISTRATION AND ALASKA'S LAW

### RESPONSIBILITY

### ATVS, ALCOHOL, AND DRUGS

### ATV SAFE RIDING TIPS

### ATV RIDER SELF-TEST



Some of the best winter footwear is also designed for use by snowmobilers. Snowmobile boots are actually two boots. That is, a felt liner and a separate outer boot, with nylon or leather tops and rubber lowers or soles. This combination keeps cold air and moisture out with an air barrier next to your feet to keep body heat in. Avoid tight-fitting boots. Cramped feet usually mean cold feet.

**Protect Your Hands:** Gloves will keep your hands warm in the winter and cool in the summer. They will also help improve your grip on the controls and protect your hands if you should fall.

On an ATV, your hands are exposed to the air stream and can become chilled in a hurry, especially in the colder weather. Again, the sport of snowmobiling has brought some especially warm new styles of hand protection to the market. They are usually padded, have a warm Orlon fleece lining, and gauntlets to keep cold air and snow from getting up your sleeves.

*Never wear any dangling clothing such as a scarf or parka with strings when riding an ATV. There are too many moving parts that could catch them and cause an accident, even strangulation.*

## TOOLS, SUPPLIES, AND PRECAUTIONS

You fasten your helmet, jump onto the seat of your ATV, and you're ready to ride, right?

Not quite. Do you know how to drive your ATV? What do you know about how your machine operates in case it malfunctions? If you know how it works, do you have the tools necessary to fix minor problems? What if it is impossible for you to fix and you are far from help? Do you have emergency food and shelter supplies so that you can safely await the arrival of help? Does someone know where you are going and when to expect you back? All of these questions must be answered before you ride anywhere.

**Learning to Ride An ATV:** To begin with, regardless of age, everyone is a beginner the first time behind the controls of any ATV. Some of these machines are so deceptively simple to operate that it can be hazardous if you are the least bit reckless, inattentive, or uninformed about your machine.

A good ATV operator learns all he or she can about how the machine operations. *It is extremely important to carefully read and follow the recommendations in the owner's manual for your machine since all ATVs are different.* Know the parts of your machine. Attend some safety and first aid classes. Read about ATVs in newspapers and magazines. Talk to other ATV owners and operators. Learn from their experience and have them teach you how to drive.

*The most important thing to learn about your ATV is that it is built for the driver only. No passengers should be carried at any time.*

ALASKA AND ATVS

PROTECTIVE CLOTHING

TOOLS, SUPPLIES, AND PRECAUTIONS

HAZARDS ON THE TRAIL

REGISTRATION AND ALASKA'S LAW

RESPONSIBILITY

ATVS, ALCOHOL, AND DRUGS

ATV SAFE RIDING TIPS

ATV RIDER SELF-TEST



**Emergency Tools:** Next, you must gather some basic tools that can help with the repairs of your machine if it breaks down on the trail. Generally, ATV manufacturers supply a basic set of tools with each machine. If your tool kit does not contain the following items, add them before you go on your next ride: pliers, a screwdriver, an adjustable wrench, and a spark plug wrench. With these four basic tools you can make most minor adjustments and repairs. Carry them on your machine at all times. In addition, carry one or two extra spark plugs. The most frequent cause of engine stalling or poor performance is a bad spark plug.

**Long Trip Supplies:** On a long trail ride or an extended trip, other emergency items that should be carried include the following: flashlight, spare headlamp and tail light bulb, electrical tape, some ¼ inch nylon rope, waterproof matches, knife, hand axe, first aid kit, compass, map, tarpaulin or tent, signal flares, emergency food supply, fuel deicer, tire patch kit, tire pump, and snowshoes during winter months.

Generally, regular maintenance will help prevent breakdowns on the trail, but sometimes your ATV will still fail when you are far from any help. The only thing you can do in the way of prevention is to have the skills, knowledge, and tools to locate and fix minor problems, and have emergency supplies in case you must wait an extended period of time for help.

## HAZARDS ON THE TRAIL

You might know how to ride your ATV and have gathered all of your supplies, but are you aware of the hazards you might encounter in your travels?

Although the best places to ride your ATV are on designated trails, these trails are still very limited. ATV operators frequently need to ride their machines in areas without designated or marked trails of any kind.

On or off the trail, there are hazards the ATV driver or snowmobile operator can encounter. A few of these hazards are listed here.

**Fixed Objects:** Watch carefully for objects hidden under the brush or snow such as rocks and stumps. Low-hanging or fallen branches can cause head injuries.

**Streams and Lakes:** In the winter, streams and lakes offer some of the most tempting, wide-open, and unobstructed ATV riding to be found anywhere, but they can also be the most dangerous. Hidden springs and currents may cause open water or water covered with only a thin layer of ice. A blanket of snow sometimes hides these areas.

Overflowing water on top of the ice and under the snow can also cause some problems. Trying to push or lift an ATV out of slush is not an easy job.

Even if you know a lake or stream well, double check ice conditions before venturing out. Check the ice periodically while on route, and travel in pairs if possible. Do not travel side-by-side or tailgate. Ride single file and allow a safe following distance between vehicles.

ALASKA AND ATVS

PROTECTIVE CLOTHING

TOOLS, SUPPLIES, AND  
PRECAUTIONS

HAZARDS ON THE  
TRAIL

REGISTRATION AND ALASKA'S  
LAW

RESPONSIBILITY

ATVS, ALCOHOL, AND DRUGS

ATV SAFE RIDING TIPS

ATV RIDER SELF-TEST



**Fences and Guy Wires:** Slamming into barbed wire fences, guy wires from power poles, and cables or chains across roads has led to serious accidents and death. Be particularly cautious of these hazards when riding at night.

**Railroad Tracks:** Avoid railroad tracks and railroad rights-of-way. These are private property.

**Night Riding:** Reduced visibility makes night riding the most dangerous time to ride. In fact, most accidents occur on ATVs and snowmobiles after dark and before dawn. Be sure your lights are working properly, slow down, and avoid unfamiliar territory. Carry a flashlight for emergencies. Wear reflective strips on your clothing for added visibility.

**Tailgating:** Riding with friends can be lots of fun, but when riding, travel single file, maintain a safe speed, and ample stopping distance between machines. Use hand signals when stopping, slowing down, or turning. *Remember, ATVs are built for one person—the operator.*

**Excessive Speeds, Wheelies, Jumping, Etc.:** These kinds of riding are for the expert and professional rider only. Serious injuries can result from these activities if you don't have the skill to do them.

**Weather:** Alaska's severe weather and sub-zero temperatures can be hazardous. Check your local forecast before going on a long ride, and dress appropriately for anticipated weather conditions.

**Roads:** Among the most common causes of serious and fatal ATV accidents are collisions with automobiles on highways. Alaska law allows an off-highway vehicle to make a direct crossing of a highway *only* if:

1. The crossing is made approximately at a right angle to the highway and at a location where visibility along the highway in both directions is clear for a sufficient distance to assure safety, and the crossing can be completed safely and without interfering with other traffic on the highway; and
2. The vehicle is brought to a complete stop before crossing the shoulder or roadway, and the driver yields the right-of-way to traffic on the highway; and
3. If the vehicle must cross a bridge, it must do so on the far right and when the way is clear.

Although riding on roadways is illegal, 63 percent of accidents involving ATVs in Alaska occurred on the roadway according to a recent study of accident statistics.

**Avalanche Areas:** In a mountainous region, become familiar with the area before you venture there with your machine. Check with local officials for the best trail routes or designated safe areas. Avoid avalanche and slide areas. ATVs and snowmobiles are loud enough to trigger avalanches.

**ALASKA AND ATVS**

**PROTECTIVE CLOTHING**

**TOOLS, SUPPLIES, AND PRECAUTIONS**

**HAZARDS ON THE TRAIL**

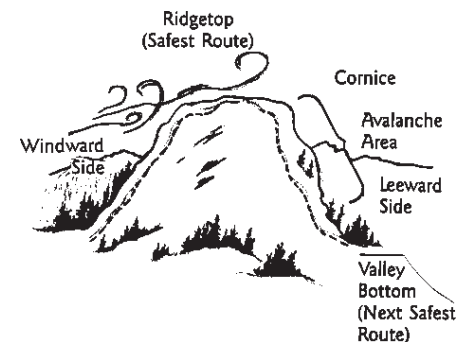
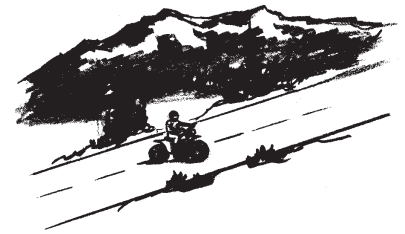
**REGISTRATION AND ALASKA'S LAW**

**RESPONSIBILITY**

**ATVS, ALCOHOL, AND DRUGS**

**ATV SAFE RIDING TIPS**

**ATV RIDER SELF-TEST**



**Cruising Range:** Learn your ATV's fuel capacity and cruising range. The machine's owner's manual will tell you the fuel tank's capacity. The cruising range can be easily determined if your machine has an odometer, but if it doesn't you can figure fuel consumption by recording hours of operating time on one tank of gas. Fuel consumption will vary with terrain and how well your vehicle is maintained.

An empty fuel tank may mean a long walk back but it can also endanger your life. *Travel with a buddy, especially on long rides, and tell someone where you are going and when you plan to return. Complete a Wilderness Trip Plan for longer rides.*

**Towing:** When towing anything behind your ATV, always use a fixed, rigid hitch. If you plan to pull a cargo trailer or wagon, use a tow bar and load the cargo so you get the lowest center of gravity.

## REGISTRATION AND ALASKA'S LAW

**ATVs For Off-Road Use ONLY:** It is illegal to ride an ATV, or any other off-road vehicle such as a snowmobile, on any highway or public parking place in Alaska. While all motor vehicles driven on such places are required by law to be registered with the Division of Motor Vehicles, ATVs *do not* comply with the Federal Department of Transportation standards for tires and rims, or Federal emission standards, ATVs are deemed unsafe for road use and cannot be registered as motor vehicles.

Your ATV can be impounded and removed to a safe area if it is found being operated on or occupying a roadway because it is not a licensed or registered motor vehicle.

Some municipalities in Alaska have ordinances that allow ATVs to be driven on roadways under specific conditions. Check with local law enforcement officers for any such regulations. Your community might have designated recreational ATV areas. Check with your local Parks and Recreation department for this information.

**Registering Your ATV As A Snow Vehicle:** A vehicle with low-pressure tires, such as a 3-wheel or 4-wheel ATV, may qualify as a snow vehicle. In Alaska, such vehicles are required by law to be registered the same way as a snowmobile. This permits you to have your ATV registered, and identified in case of theft, but **does not** mean it is a licensed motor vehicle. You **may not** operate a snow vehicle off your private property unless the snow vehicle has been registered with the Division of Motor Vehicles.

Registering your ATV as a snow vehicle requires a two-year registration at a nominal fee. Permanent numbered decals are provided with the registration. The equipment required to be on an ATV for snow vehicle registration purposes are: brakes, headlamps, a throttle, and an exhaust muffler.

ALASKA AND ATVS

PROTECTIVE CLOTHING

TOOLS, SUPPLIES, AND  
PRECAUTIONS

HAZARDS ON THE TRAIL

REGISTRATION AND  
ALASKA'S LAW

RESPONSIBILITY

ATVS, ALCOHOL, AND DRUGS

ATV SAFE RIDING TIPS

ATV RIDER SELF-TEST



## RESPONSIBILITY

ATV riders share the trail with other ATVs, snowmobiles, and non-motorized groups such as mountain bicyclists and cross-country skiers. All users should respect the other person's right to the trail.

Reckless driving of off-road vehicles is an arrestable offense. You could be charged with trespassing if you ride on private property without the owner's permission. Any damages you cause could constitute criminal mischief for which you can be held criminally liable. Loud mufflers in residential area bring complaints of disorderly conduct. *Parents or guardians have liability placed on them for civil damages and court costs up to \$2,000 resulting from willful or malicious damage to real or personal property by minors under their legal custody.*

## ATVS, ALCOHOL, AND, DRUGS

There is a lot of information available on how alcohol and drugs affect automobile drivers. Little research has been done on the affects of alcohol on ATV operators, but most ATV drivers would agree that it takes as much or more coordination and alertness to ride an ATV as it does to drive a car.

Skills such as visual sharpness, reaction time, judgment, and general awareness are hindered by alcohol. These skills are critical to an ATV operator.

Alcohol is not the only drug that may impair your ability ride an ATV. Many prescription drugs have adverse effects on your driving skills. Even over-the-counter drugs, such as cold tablets and allergy remedies can lessen your driving abilities temporarily. Read the warning labels on all drugs.

Driving an ATV under the influence of drug or alcohol was a factor in over half the deaths associated with ATVs over a two-year period in Alaska. It is considered the foremost contribution factor to ATV fatalities in the State.

## ATV SAFE RIDING TIPS

1. ATVs are designated for off-road use only and should never be driven on pavement.
2. Always wear a helmet as well as other protective gear and apparel.
3. Don't ride beyond your ability; learn to operate your ATV from an experienced operator.
4. Tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return.
5. Your ATV repair kit should, at the least, include the manufacturer's tool kit.
6. Carry a first aid pack.
7. Carry some snacks and a water supply with you.
8. Always ride with a buddy.
9. ATVs are designed for one person: the driver.
10. Watch out for thin ice that may be camouflaged by snow.
11. Use maps and a compass if you are riding in an unfamiliar area. Make a mental note of landmarks that might help you if you get lost. If you are lost at night, do not move around. You will waste valuable fuel that you will need to ride safely in the daylight.
12. Make sure you have enough fuel to get you where you're going and home.

## ALASKA AND ATVS

### PROTECTIVE CLOTHING

### TOOLS, SUPPLIES, AND PRECAUTIONS

### HAZARDS ON THE TRAIL

### REGISTRATION AND ALASKA'S LAW

## RESPONSIBILITY

## ATVS, ALCOHOL, AND DRUGS

## ATV SAFE RIDING TIPS

### ATV RIDER SELF-TEST





## ATV RIDER SELF-TEST

Here is a chance to evaluate your knowledge of ATV safety and off-road vehicle laws in Alaska. Just take the following self-test. The correct answers are located at the end. Review the material in this publication for those answers which you had incorrect.

1. The single most important piece of personal equipment an ATV driver can wear is:
  - a. Helmet
  - b. Above-the-calf boots
  - c. Leather gloves
  - d. Sturdy pants
2. ATVs are built for only one person to ride at a time: the driver.
  - a. True
  - b. False
3. A minimal ATV tool kit to be carried on every ride includes:
  - a. Screw driver and pair of pliers
  - b. Adjustable wrench
  - c. Spark plug wrench and extra spark plugs
  - d. All of the above
4. If it is necessary to cross a roadway while riding an ATV, it should be done only where it will not interfere with traffic.
  - a. True
  - b. False
5. Riding an ATV on private property in Alaska without the owner's permission is an arrestable offense.
  - a. True
  - b. False
6. In Alaska, an ATV may be registered with the Division of Motor Vehicles as a snow vehicle but not as a motor vehicle.
  - a. True
  - b. False
7. An ATV driver should not drink and ride because alcohol affects the following skills critical to the operation of the vehicle:
  - a. Visual sharpness
  - b. Reaction time
  - c. General awareness
  - d. Judgment
  - e. All of the above

**ALASKA AND ATVS**

**PROTECTIVE CLOTHING**

**TOOLS, SUPPLIES, AND PRECAUTIONS**

**HAZARDS ON THE TRAIL**

**REGISTRATION AND ALASKA'S LAW**

**RESPONSIBILITY**

**ATVS, ALCOHOL, AND DRUGS**

**ATV SAFE RIDING TIPS**

**ATV RIDER SELF-TEST**



ANSWERS: 1. a; 2. a; 3. d; 4. a; 5. a; 6. a; 7. e.