

UTV falls through thin Lake Koshkonong ice

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SUMNER — A Town of Sumner resident was rescued Sunday afternoon after his utility vehicle broke through thin ice on Lake Koshkonong.

The Fort Atkinson Fire Department and Ryan Brothers Ambulance Service were dispatched to the north shore of Lake Koshkonong off Lamp Road in the Town of Sumner at 1:42 p.m. by fishermen who witnessed Damon Lemaster's utility vehicle break through the ice and partly enter the water.

Fort Atkinson Fire Department Division Chief Dion Brown estimated that the vehicle had broken through the ice approximately 300 to 400 yards offshore.

Lemaster reportedly was driving an Argo utility vehicle or UTV when it broke through the ice.

UTVs differ from all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) in that UTVs typically have a side-by-side seating arrangement, seatbelts and rollover protection.

Most also have cargo boxes at the rear of the vehicle and many are designed to be amphibious.

“It wasn’t an ATV or a four-wheeler,” Brown said.

He said Fort Atkinson Fire Chief Daryl Rausch responded in his personal vehicle. In addition, the department dispatched its heavy rescue truck and the utility truck hauling a trailer with the department’s ATV and a flat-bottom boat to the scene.

Upon arrival, Brown said, the fishermen who witnessed the incident were approaching Lemaster and attempting to assist getting him out of the water.

Donning water-rescue garb called “Gumby suits,” two Fort Atkinson firefighters went onto the ice to approach Lemaster.

“We were there for a couple of minutes and we could see the fishermen got him out and he was walking toward us,” Brown said.

Firefighters met up with the man about 100 yards off shore. The vehicle remained in the hole in the ice.

In Wisconsin, owners have 30 days to remove their vehicles from the water.

Lemaster was examined by Ryan Brothers EMTs and transported to his home just up the street.

Following the incident, Brown was hesitant to offer any suggestion as to whether he believed the ice was “safe.”

“I’ve heard there is only between three and five inches of ice and it’s been kind of warm the last couple of days,” he noted.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources website, recommendations regarding ice safety note that there is no such thing as 100-percent safe ice. The DNR states that strength of ice cannot be judged by appearance, age, thickness, temperature or whether the ice is covered with snow.

The rule of thumb is that at least three inches of ice is needed to support a person, while at least 15 inches is necessary to support a pick-up truck.