

Snowmobiler crashes on Rock River in downtown Fort Atkinson

By Ryan Whisner rwhisner@dailyunion.com | Posted: Thursday, January 18, 2018 6:43 pm

A snowmobiler was injured Thursday morning while attempting to skim over open water of the Rock River beneath Fort Atkinson's Main Street bridge.

Fort Atkinson Fire Chief Daryl Rausch said the incident occurred at 11:52 a.m Thursday just downstream or west of the Main Street bridge.

Two snowmobilers apparently were traveling west at high speeds on the Rock River when they apparently became aware that there was open water under the bridge. Rausch said one of the snowmobilers was unable to stop, so he revved his engine to possibly skim over the open water in a stunt referred to as "shooting the hole" or "water skipping."

"In the process, for some reason, he lost control and after he was on ice on the other side, the snowmobile rolled over," Rausch said.

The preliminary 911 call indicated the rider had been pinned under the vehicle; however, Rausch could not confirm that as the rider already was being escorted to shore at the time he arrived on the scene.

Rausch said the man reportedly was left briefly unconscious. However, the chief was unable to corroborate that statement due to his arrival time.

Fort Atkinson police, firefighters and the second rider assisted in getting the man off the ice.

"The snowmobile never went into the water; it was taken and parked in the municipal parking lot behind the Fort Atkinson Municipal Building," the chief said.

Due to sustaining some head and facial injuries, the snowmobiler was transported to Fort Memorial Hospital by Ryan Brothers Ambulance Service.

The chief noted that, according to the riders, another snowmobile had gone into the water under the Main Street bridge Wednesday afternoon or evening.

"Nobody was called for that one, but we found out after the fact that they had recovered the snowmobile on their own," Rausch said. "Apparently that was a large group and one individual was injured slightly and the rest of the group took care of the snowmobile while he was being transported, I believe, by private vehicle to the hospital."

The chief was not pleased to learn of the second incident, saying that it further demonstrates the safety

issues of being on the Rock River when temperatures have been fluctuating.

“It is unfortunate because with the weather changing as much as it has and with these large swings in temperature, in one place on the river or on the lake, there is 18 inches of ice, and you can see going through downtown that there is a lot of open water right now,” he said.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, 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.

“It is not a real safe environment on the river right now,” Rausch said, noting that Fort Atkinson firefighters and other area departments have responded to multiple incidents of ATVs, snowmobiles or people involved in ice/water rescues on Lake Koshkonong this season.

The chief said he is concerned about the Lake Koshkonong-Rock River fisherie being held this weekend, as the forecast calls for warmer weather and possible rainy conditions.

“I’m a bit concerned that somebody could get themselves in trouble out there,” he said, noting that there will be a couple of firefighters on site to help with safety measures.

The 2018 Battle 4 the Bounty Fisherie and Poker Run on Lake Koshkonong and the Rock River is set for today through Sunday. Both were to begin at noon Friday.

Entry for the poker run is \$15 and there are eight stops. Winners will be announced Saturday, Jan. 20, at 3 p.m. at the Island Bar and Grill on Blackhawk Island Road.

Adults’ entrance to the fisherie costs \$20. The last weigh-in will be at noon Sunday at the Sunset Bar and Grill.

There will be 50/50 raffles and \$10,000 tagged fish.

A children’s event for participants ages 6-15 also was slated to start Friday noon, concluding at noon Saturday at Island Bar and Grill. Entry is free for ages 6 and under and costs \$5 for those 7-15.

Signup for events is available at Island Bar and Grill, Sunset Bar and Grill, American Legion Post 166 Dugout or Rock River Bait Box.