



It is important to know about the natural hazards we could encounter during this time of year, when the warmer weather is upon us. Activities like ice fishing, pond hockey and hiking along stream side trails can be perfectly safe while everything is good and frozen; but when mild temperatures begin to become a daily occurrence, the nice weather begins the melting of the built up snow and ice, and this is when the hazards become more of a concern.

Typically, ice break-up and fast flowing waters wouldn't happen until well into spring, but in the past few years we have had significant mid-winter thaws that melt snow, causing high flows and ice breakup. Whether we have conditions like these or a standard spring thaw, the rivers and creeks in the Ganaraska region react quickly to the conditions with increased runoff. Under these circumstances, ice cover becomes thin and cracks, and the water beneath the ice starts moving faster and higher. The most dangerous scenario occurs when flows have increased but ice cover is still intact. On the surface, everything looks safe, meanwhile beneath the ice there is fast moving, very cold water. The average temperature of melting snow and ice water is 0-5o. River banks can get very slick, and the danger of slipping down one or falling through the ice into the water is minor compared to what happens soon after.

When one is emerged in cold water, hypothermia can set in very quickly. Being aware of the dangers and educated about this is very important. Hypothermia can occur in the matter of 5-10 minutes; your body loses heat rapidly and soon the blood from all of your extremities will travel to your heart and internal organs in an attempt to keep you alive. It limits your ability to keep yourself afloat, causes unclear thinking, lack of motor skills, and eventually, unconsciousness occurs. Hypothermia is life threatening; immersion in water at or near freezing can result in death within 15 minutes.

Please remember that water bodies of all sizes, from ditches to rivers, can become dangerous under spring-like conditions. They may look safe, but we all should just stay away from them. Always keep in mind how quickly something can happen. Stay safe, stay informed, be cautious, and make sure children are aware of the dangers when it comes to the spring thaw. The most important message to be passed along is to just "Stay Away!"

