

BUBBLERS - SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

IMPORTANT SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS FOR BUBBLERS

With the temperature dropping, our thoughts turn to preparing our cottages for the cold and snow to come. For some, this means closing up the cottage until the spring. For others, it is a time to prepare for life on the lake during the winter. Regardless, we all do our best to prepare our properties to withstand the toughest weather Canada can throw at us. Some property owners have opted to give their waterfront structures a helping hand, through the installation of bubblers.

What Are Bubblers?

For those who are unfamiliar, 'bubblers' are a type of de-icing system, intended to prevent the build-up of ice at or around waterfront structures like docks and boathouses. There are several different types of systems, but generally these devices use air or propellers to create zones of agitated and warmer water to prevent ice from forming. Protecting our cottage properties is understandable and an increasing number of cottagers in Ontario are turning to these devices as part of their winter preparation.

However, if you are a regular bubbler user, or if you are considering installing one at your property, it is important to plan carefully and be sure that you are not contributing to a significant hazard on the lake.

Creating a Hole in the Water

Bubblers are often turned on and left largely unattended by property owners throughout the winter. Without careful planning, management and consideration of the nature of your waterfront area, your bubbler can de-ice a significantly larger portion of the water than is necessary to protect your property. This is especially true in shallow or sheltered areas, or when several bubblers are active near one-another, with multiple property owners inadvertently creating a massive hole in the ice, hundreds of feet in size. These holes in the ice can pose a serious safety risk to winter users of our lakes, especially at night or during storms with poor visibility.

Legal Implications

[Section 263 \(1\) of the Criminal Code of Canada](#) is very clear that those who make or cause to be made an opening in ice are under a legal duty to guard the opening in a manner adequate to prevent persons from falling in by accident, and adequate to warn them that the opening exists. If you fail to perform these duties, the Code states that you may be found guilty of serious offences, up to and including manslaughter.

Risk Management Considerations

If you chose to operate a bubbler to protect your property, please make sure you are taking all steps possible to ensure the safety of all lake users and consider taking these risk management steps:

- Place and angle your devices with care to keep the impacted area as localized as possible;
- Talk to your neighbours to avoid doubling up in an area. It is possible that one bubbler will do the trick.
- Equip your system with a thermostat or timer control. Running 24/7 creates oversized openings.
- Place clear signs near the bubbling area, visible from all directions noting "Danger Open Water".
- Run an amber light to mark the hazard at night and during storms. Do not use a red light, as this can be mistaken for the brake lights of a snowmobile and draw people towards the risk, rather than turn them away.
- Monitor your property. If you cannot be present, have someone check regularly to ensure the system is operating, the effected area is appropriate in size, and that the warning lights and markers remain in place.
- Where possible, a knowledgeable and experienced contractor should be used to configure the system.

Summer or winter, safety on the water is a top priority!

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