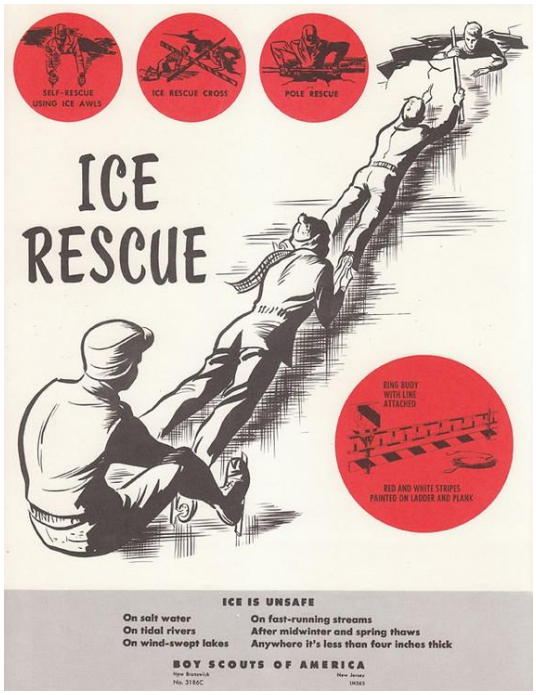
Ice Safety

Ice safety seems to be one of those subjects which are not really given the attention it deserves. Walking, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, ice fishing, cross-country skiing, skating, and playing sports are dangerous pastimes when you don't know how to tell if the ice is thick enough to withstand weight. There are ways to assist in gauging the potential safety of ice, such as observing its color, testing its thickness and being aware of external factors such as temperature, local conditions and local knowledge. However, no sport undertaken on ice over water bodies is ever without risk. If in doubt, do not go onto the ice; moreover, it never pays to be on the ice too early or too late in the season.



On a winter outing with your scouts take the time to educate them on ice safety. No one wants to find themselves in the position the guy in the top picture is in. But you can only avoid this by gaining some basic knowledge and understanding of the potential hazards. It is also very important that you educate your scouts and make sure they understand it is extremely dangerous to be on ice that is not safe.

"Precautions need to be taken to ensure ice is safe for your winter recreational activities, but determining the strength of ice is difficult. There is no such thing as 100 percent safe ice. Most ice-related accidents occur when people don't understand ice formation or how to read ice conditions, as well as carelessness, overconfidence, and a lack of appreciation for the risks involved when on the ice."
http://www.scouting.org/sitecore/content/Home/HealthandSafety/SafetyThoughts/120203.aspx

When determining the safety of ice, remember the following:

- Ice strength depends on a combination of factors: thickness, external temperature over a period of time and on the day, snow coverage, depth of water under the ice, size of water body, chemical composition of water (fresh or saltwater), and local climate fluctuations.
- Ice thickness is never consistent, so always take multiple measurements.
- Snow on ice acts as an insulator, making ice warmer and weaker.
- Extreme cold snaps will weaken ice.
- The weakest ice will be in the center and along the edge of the water.
- Wet cracks, along with slushy and darker areas are normally weaker.
- Snow can cover open-water areas, so use extreme caution.
- Ice over running water is more dangerous than ice over lakes and ponds.

Tips for staying safe on the ice include the following:

- Never go on ice that is less than 4 inches thick.
- Only go on clear, thick ice. Cloudy ice is unsafe.
- Wear a life jacket for warmth and safety.
- Dress warmly in layers.
- Always keep your pets on a leash. If a pet falls through the ice, do not attempt a rescue. Go for help.
- Always carry ice picks or claws and know how to rescue yourself or someone else.
- Always go out with a partner and inform others of your plans.
- Have an emergency plan and carry a first-aid kit, extra clothes, and blankets for emergencies.

http://www.mycariboonow.com/8682/winter-weather-brings-focus-on-ice-safety-in-the-cariboo/

Remember, Always plan ahead, make the scouts in the troop be part of forming the plan, and discuss potential hazards and how to avoid them. If they are part of the plan they will take ownership of it and will learn a lot more than just you telling them what they are going to do.

Remember to review the Guide to Safe Scouting, become familiar with Chapter XI, "Winter Activities".

BSA Health and Safety thoughts on Ice safety:
http://www.scouting.org/sitecore/content/Home/HealthandSafety/SafetyThoughts/120203.aspx