

OFF-ROAD SAFETY

ATV

The use of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) has grown over recent years. According to the Canadian Safety Council, approximately 850,000 Canadians owned an off-road Vehicle in 2004. With this increase, there have been many injuries, fatal crashes and even deaths, with the highest overall rates being reported in **Northern Ontario** (Canadian Safety Council, 2004).

A report by the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) indicates that ATV-related hospitalizations have increased by 25% in just under a decade, rising from 3,296 in 1997 to 4,104 in 2005. Among ATV injuries, 10% were classified as severe.

Children between the ages of 5 and 10 are the most vulnerable, as the sheer weight of ATVs cause serious injuries in this age group. Also, ATVs unlike any other automobile do not have restraints or protective frames. Therefore, riders are often thrown from the vehicle, leading to head, spinal cord and internal injuries that can be fatal (Thunder Bay District Health Unit, 2005).

In Ontario, there currently is no minimum age required to drive an ATV. However, many manufacturers have clearly indicated that if you are under the age of 16, you shouldn't be riding or operating an ATV.

Children under the age of 16 do not have the judgement, maturity and/or physical strength to safely operate adult sized all-terrain vehicles (Smartrisk, 2005). Property damage, injuries or death can be unfortunate outcomes.

In order to prevent incidents from happening, the following recommendations should be taken seriously:

- A proper-fitting and government-approved helmet is mandatory and should be worn at all times.
- Wear proper foot gear, appropriate clothing such as long-sleeved shirts, long pants, gloves and goggles.
- ATVs are NOT designed for more than one passenger. They can easily flip back and cause serious injuries for both the rider and the passenger.
- Be cautious and drive at safe speeds. Responsibility is the key.
- Never drink and ride. Always plan for alternative methods of transportation.

HAVE FUN AND RIDE SMART!

*Ministry of Transport
SmartRisk
Ontario Injury Prevention Resource Centre*

