

## **ATV's: Not Always User Friendly- Especially for Children**

With summer in full swing, outdoor activities are at an all time high. Besides recreational activities, such as boating, golfing, camping, and fishing, the use of all-terrain vehicles (ATV's) is much greater this time of the year. With that increase in use, there is also an increase in preventable injury, disability and death. With proper instruction, following manufacturer's safety recommendations, and the use of plain common sense, ATV's can be a fun and safe recreational experience. However, statistics provided by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources are showing that for children under the age of 16, ATV use can, and often is, a dangerous activity.

The Michigan DNR reports that 41% of the ORV deaths involve children under the age of 16. In addition to fatalities, many others suffer permanent disability including paralysis, brain damage, and a host of other life-long medical conditions. According to the DNR, most of the crashes can be traced to factors such as lack of proper adult supervision, characteristics of the machines, and lack of adequate training. The DNR reports that parents appear to be showing a lack of understanding of these hazards. Therefore, it is imperative that the first step for any parent/guardian considering purchasing, or allowing a child to operate any ATV, is to obtain the necessary safety education before proceeding. Once the parent has first gained the knowledge about safe operation of an ATV, only then are they in a position to provide the proper instruction and informed guidance for their child. This should include, at a minimum, mandatory attendance at an ATV safe riding course, and selecting a machine designed for the age, size and ability of the child. Because of the inherent safety hazards associated with off-road vehicle use, the Michigan Legislature has enacted regulations that directly affect ATV's. These include:

- Operation of ORV's by children less than 16 years of age
- Safety equipment required of all ORV operators and passengers
- The use and possession of alcohol while operating an ORV
- Unlawful operation on roads open to regular vehicle traffic

There are many other considerations that need to be looked at regarding ATV use. Adults should select trails that are appropriate for use by young riders, and those presenting less potential riding hazards. Educate young riders to be ever alert for oncoming dangers, including the possibility of outstretched cables or chains. Becoming educated and responsible, setting the example for safe riding, and showing sensitivity to concerns for the environment are just some ways that adults can help keep ATV use safe and enjoyable, especially for our youth.

For additional information regarding ATV use in Michigan, please access the Michigan DNR website at <http://www.michigan.gov/dnr>, and type ATV in the search box. For additional information you can also contact a number of Operations Service Centers located around the state. Locally you can contact the Marquette Operations Service Center at 906-228-6561.