

OPERATIONS

Time of day

Obviously it is best to run when there is minimal traffic. Usually early morning is best in most areas. If you must run at night or during heavy traffic times, it is essential to use as much visibility gear as possible and it's advisable to have an "escort" run out in front of your team.

Trail usage

Though not often practical, the safest possible way to run dogs on the trails is to have an "escort vehicle" (snowmobile, ATV, etc.) "run interference" to alert oncoming traffic of your presence. If you are running in a group of two or more and encounter oncoming traffic, you should use standard snowmobile hand signals to indicate that you are in a group. The lead driver signals that traffic is behind him. Each succeeding driver does the same, until the last in the group signals he is the end. If a driver is not wearing mittens, he can signal with raised fingers how many drivers follow.

Keep to the right! Rules of the road indicate that users should keep to the right. Failure to stay right causes much confusion for oncoming traffic. This is especially true of the wider trails and should include going around turns and corners. You must train your dog(s) to run on the right hand side of the trails! If you need help, let us know. We may be able to offer some training tips.

If you must stop on the trail, please pull as far off to the right as practical. Off the trail completely is best. Try to stop in a place where there is good visibility from the front and rear.

If training in the "off season" when trails are not open to snowmobiles, you are responsible for getting permission from property owners to use trails on their property. Even though you may be using ATV approved trails, this approval does not pertain to running dogs and you need to get written

permission to do so. It may also be an appropriate time to ask permission to place signage indicating your presence on the trails.

Signage

If you consistently run in a particular area, consider putting up signs to alert other users that there may be sled dogs running on the trails. Check with the local snowmobile club before posting. Possible choices include "Sled Dogs Use These Trails," "Please Slow for Dog Teams," "Sled Dog Training Area," etc. We urge ALL mushers to join their local snowmobile club and other clubs in the areas of the trails you use.

Snowmobile Operation Hand Signals



STOP

Left arm raised from the shoulder, extended over the head, palm of the hand flat.



SLOWING

Left arm extended out and down, use downward flapping motion of the hand



RIGHT TURN

Left arm raised at shoulder height, elbow bent forearm vertical, palm of hand flat



LEFT TURN

Left arm extended straight out from shoulder, pointed in direction of turn



SLED FOLLOWING

Arm raised, with elbow bent and thumb pointing backward. Move arm in a hitch-hiking motion from the front to back



ONCOMING SLEDS

Left arm raised with elbow bent, the forearm vertical, the wrist bent. The arm should move from left to right over the head



LAST SLED IN LINE

Left forearm out with palm flat, move repeatedly out and down at 45 degree angle

TRAIL SAFETY AND ETIQUETTE GUIDELINES FOR MUSHERS



Remember that your actions represent *all* mushers. Promote our sport by conducting yourself in a manner that reflects respect for private property, other persons, and your dogs. Be sure to ask permission if you are using trails or hooking up your team on private property.

Winter trails in Vermont are used by many, and all users have the right to expect safe use of these trails. You should expect anyone and anything on a trail. Safe trail usage begins with you! Plan ahead. Know the trails, conditions, road crossings, traffic and other hazards before you leave. Try to avoid high-traffic hours whenever possible. Your presence on trails should not present a safety issue to anyone. Our continued use of trails depends on us not being a hazard. Behave as though you are a guest on trails, because you are.

Clean up after yourself and leave the area better than you found it. Dispose of all waste (dog and human litter) in a garbage bag and take it with you. Don't toss waste into the woods.

MUSHER SAFETY

Dogs

Dogs should be up-to-date with their immunizations and copies or proof of immunization should be available. You are totally responsible for the conduct, safety, and well-being of your dogs.

Equipment

Be sure your equipment is in sound working order and you are able to safely stop and remain stopped on the trails. Match your equipment to the trail conditions and number of dogs.

Control

Never take more dogs than you can safely control! If you have any doubts, either reduce the number of dogs or have someone come along for assistance. Be especially aware and cautious at all road crossings. Trained dogs and proper equipment are the key to successful control. Remember, you are responsible for the behavior and control of your dogs.

TRAIL SAFETY

Being safe on the trails begins with being visible and being in control.

Visibility

Do not present a hazard to yourself or others. Being seen gives other trail users the opportunity to be alert to your presence. It does not mean they have an obligation to give any special right of way. They may as a courtesy, but are not required to do so. The responsibility for being under control and in the right place on the trail still falls on the musher. When stopping on the trail or yielding to other trail users, avoid turns and hills where visibility is compromised.

Clothing

Wear reflective or highly visible clothing or both. Brighter is better. Hunter orange, red, lime, etc. are all good choices. Jackets (or vests) are best, hats next, and pants last. Be seen!

Reflective material

Reflective jackets or vests are a must when running at night. Reflective material on your sled and dogs is also critical for safe nighttime operation. Be visible from both front and rear.

Lighting

Lighting is essential when running at night and can also be helpful during daytime. A headlamp on the musher and some sort of light plus reflective tape on your lead dogs should be considered the absolute minimum for safe operation in dusk or darkness. Lead dogs can wear lighted collars or have small lights attached to the leader neckline, collar, or harness. Consider putting lights on team dogs as well. Quick-flashing red lights, while cheap and readily available, may not always be the best choice. Observers have difficulty determining their exact distance away and their speed and direction if the wearer is moving, but they are better than nothing. This problem is lessened with slow-flashing lights. A powerful headlight on your sled or rig (powered by a small rechargeable motorcycle battery?) should be strongly considered. It could be turned on when running in an area known to have "high traffic."

Dogs and equipment

Dogs are low to the ground and can be "invisible" to oncoming traffic, especially when coming up over a rise in the trail. Anything to improve their visibility will give added safety. Vests and lighted collars as well as reflective lines and reflective tape on harnesses and sleds should be considered essential. A whip-type bicycle flag attached to your sled or rig may be helpful.

Signaling

Learn and use proper snowmobile hand signals, so you will be able to signal to others on trails and know what they are signaling you. Moving a bright light up & down or side to side may help to point out your position to another trail user and serve notice that you are not a snowmobile or other motorized user.