Message from WMFS to Parents and Carers

'Don't enter or venture' - Stay away from frozen open water as cold snap continues

West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS) is urging the public to stay well away from lakes, ponds, rivers, canals and reservoirs as freezing temperatures hit the West Midlands.

Frozen water can look harmless, but it's one of the most dangerous winter hazards we face.

Surface ice can look deceptively solid, but is often thin, fragile and unpredictable. It can give way suddenly – plunging people or pets into freezing cold water and serious danger.

Cold water shock can affect anyone, regardless of age or swimming ability, and can quickly lead to loss of control, exhaustion and drowning.

WMFS is particularly concerned about the risks to children, who may be tempted to play near or on frozen water, and dog walkers who may instinctively venture on to ice or into the water if a pet gets into difficulty.

Parents and carers are urged to speak to children about the dangers, to ensure they understand that no ice is ever safe. Dog walkers are advised to keep pets on leads near water during icy conditions. Never step onto ice, and - crucially – don't enter water or venture on to ice if a person or animal gets into difficulty. Call 999 immediately and ask for the fire service."

What to do if YOU fall through ice:

- stay calm and shout for help
- spread your arms out across the surface of the ice in front of you
- first check if the ice is strong enough. If it is, then kick your legs to propel yourself forward
- lie flat and use your arms to pull yourself over the ice towards the shore
- if the ice on the water breaks, try to make your way to the bank or shore, breaking ice in front of you as you go
- if you find yourself stuck and unable to escape, wait for help. Stay as still as possible to conserve your energy. Bring your arms close to your sides and keep your legs together, while keeping your head out of the water.

What to do if you see SOMEONE ELSE fall through the ice:

- shout for help, call 999 or 112 and – if the incident involves inland water – ask for the fire service
- do not go on to ice to attempt a rescue
- call out to the casualty and encourage them to stay calm
- to try to reach the person from the bank, use a rope, pole, tree branch, clothes tied together or anything else that can extend your reach
- lie down flat on the bank, to avoid slipping or being pulled in
- if you can't reach them, try sliding something that floats – like a football or large plastic bottle – to them, to help them float
- if the casualty is too far away, DO NOT try to rescue them yourself
- wait for the emergency services to arrive. Continue to calm and reassure the person.

More winter water safety messaging can be found here.