

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters Office of Public Affairs Fragmented Public Affairs Guidance (FRAGPAG)

Topic: BoatSafe365 – Cold Water Safety

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Background: Cold-water education is vital to the safety of mariners across the United States, especially during the fall months as the water temperature drops. During the fall and early winter, waterfowl hunters and striped bass fishermen get out on the water when it is most dangerous. Therefore, as part of our boating safety campaign, BoatSafe365, spreading the message about the dangers of cold water and how to prepare and react is being promoted via safety messages throughout September. These messages should bring awareness to the dangers of boating in cold water and how to prepare for it.

Posture/Guidance: Active. Proactively engage the public and the media, conveying the listed information about cold water. Coordinate with community events to localize the messaging.

Key Messages:

- Cold water can be deadly
- Always wear a life jacket
- Dress for the water, not the weather

Talking Points:

- Dress for the water, not the weather. The fall and spring months can deceive boaters into thinking that the water temperature is warm, just because the air may be. Water temperatures at 70 degrees or below can cause hypothermia.
- Check the water temperatures, if they are anywhere near 70 degrees, wear a wetsuit, drysuit, float coat or some sort of waterproof, insulated gear.
- Roughly 20 percent of people who fall into cold water die within the first minute due to cold-water shock. Cold-water shock causes an involuntary gasp and an immediate loss in breath control, which increases the risk of sudden drowning
- Wearing a life jacket can keep you afloat, provide insulation and make you visible. Even the strongest swimmers lose muscle control after 10 minutes of being exposed to cold water, making it nearly impossible to locate and put on a life jacket after-the-fact.
- Maximize your chances of survival by utilizing the H.E.L.P. position (Heat Escape Lessening Position) if you fall into the water. Bring your knees up to your

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chest and clasp your hands together locking your knees to your chest, creating a tight ball with your body. If you can't get your knees all the way to your chest, cross your calves, bring your knees as close to your body as possible, cross your arms and put your fingers under your armpits.

- Hypothermia usually sets in within about an hour of being exposed to cold water.
- File a float plan. Letting people know when and where you are going, and when you are expected to be back, exponentially increases the odds of being rescued if something unfortunate happens. You can create a float plan quickly and easily on the boating safety app.
- Sound and visual signaling devices are required, no matter the time of year. Attaching a whistle to your clothing before going out is a good idea.

Questions & Responses:

Q1: Why is cold water dangerous?

R1: Roughly 20 percent of people who fall into cold-water die in the first minute due to cold-water shock, which causes an involuntary gasp and an immediate loss in breath control, resulting in sudden drowning. Water temperatures less than 70 degrees can cause hypothermia. Prolonged exposure to hypothermic temperatures can cause unconsciousness and death.

Q2: How do I know if the water temperature in my area is dangerous?

R2: Temperatures below 70 degrees are dangerous and can cause hypothermia and induces cold-water shock.

Q3: Where can I check the water temperatures in my area?

R3: You can find out the water temperatures near you at:

<https://www.nodc.noaa.gov/dsdt/cwtg/>

Q4: What are some safety measures to take before going out on cold water?

R4:

- Check the weather and WATER TEMPERATURE before embarking.
- File a float plan
- Dress for the water, not the weather
- Give your boat a look-over for any holes, mechanical issues and ensure that the drain plug is in.

Q5: What safety equipment should you have when boating on cold water?

R5: WEAR A LIFE JACKET the entire time you are on the water. Having a life jacket, sound-signaling device (such as a whistle) and a visual signaling device (such as a flare) is required.

Q6: What are some additional preparations are recommended

R6

- Having a floatable, waterproof case or cover for your phone can be a useful tool in finding and preserving your phone to call for help. Don't overload your boat.

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- Having too much gear onboard can make a vessel unstable and puts your boat at risk of capsizing.
- Hunting and fishing can sometimes require a lot of gear; do not sacrifice safety equipment for sporting equipment.

Q7: What the first thing you should you do if you fall into cold water?

R7: If you know you are going into the water, shield your mouth and nose with your hand, this can help you maintain control of your breathing.

Q8: After entering the water, how can I increase my chances of survival?

R8: Grab onto something that floats, even if it's something like a hunting decoy, any additional buoyancy helps. Try to keep as much of your body out of the water as possible. Utilize the H.E.L.P. position.

Online Resources

Hypothermia facts:

<https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/staysafe/hypothermia.html>

Float plan app

<http://uscgboating.org/mobile/>

Cold water facts

<https://www.weather.gov/safety/coldwater>

Water temperature guide

<https://www.nodc.noaa.gov/dsdt/cwtg/>

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