



NEWS RELEASE

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

BUILDING STRONG®

For Immediate Release:
July 9, 2020

Contact:
Pam Doty, 817-886-1727
pamela.j.doty@usace.army.mil
Doug Garman, 202-761-1807
doug.m.garman@usace.army.mil

Army Corps of Engineers reports an increase in adult drowning at its lake and river projects this summer

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced today that more than 30 people lost their lives to drowning in June at lake and river projects the agency manages. The June statistics represent a 47 percent increase in drownings over the same time period last year. USACE also reported that nearly all the drowning victims were adult males between the ages of 18 and 85 and were not wearing a life jacket at the time of the drowning.

“With some public beaches and community pools closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are finding more people this summer are swimming, wading, floating, and playing in open water areas (lakes, rivers, ponds, etc.) not designated for swimming,” said Pam Doty, USACE National Water Safety Program manager. “Unfortunately, these areas are associated with hidden dangers that swimmers may not be aware of including waves, currents, drop-offs, underwater obstructions and others.”

“July is the month when we normally see the most water-related accidents and fatalities so there is even more reason to be concerned this year,” added Doty. “We have a continuous water safety awareness program at our lake and river projects, and we stress to the recreating public a number of things to be aware of before going swimming in open waters.”

USACE officials recommend people be aware of these safety concerns prior to swimming in open waters:

- The majority of adults who drown in open water knew how to swim and exceeded or overestimated their swimming abilities. Most people learn to swim in a pool where they can easily reach the sides or push off the bottom when they need to take a break. There are no sides to grab onto in open water and the bottom can be several feet below you, which can make taking a break and relaxing hard to do unless you are wearing a life jacket.
- When swimming or wading along a shoreline there might be a deep drop-off just a few feet away. Drop-offs might be more than 100 feet deep at some lakes. Swimming in a protected area, such as a cove or around a boat might seem safer, but even in those situations you can become exhausted. Boats tend to drift away and people misjudge distances like how far it is to the shoreline.
- Sometimes people who become exhausted while swimming or overestimate their swimming ability never learned proper breathing techniques for swimming. Holding your breath too long while swimming or over-breathing by taking several deep breaths in a row (hyperventilating) before a swim can cause

shallow-water blackout. Shallow-water blackout causes people to faint or blackout in the water and drown. A simple description of what makes that happen is that it's the result of low oxygen to your brain. Shallow-water blackout often happens to people who know how to swim well because they deny their body's desire to inhale for too long. Once someone loses consciousness water enters the lungs, causing them to drown.

- Some adults are hesitant to tell their friends that they cannot swim very well. In a pool they can get away with that mentality easier than they can in open water. In open water even strong swimmers can become exhausted and drown. Also, if you don't swim often your swimming ability will decrease the older you get. Some people may know how to float, but they don't think about survival floating when they panic. Wave action and currents also make it difficult to float in open water.
- Carbon monoxide poisoning is another thing to be aware of when swimming or floating around boats. Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless, and tasteless gas. It is heavier than air and lighter than water, so it floats on the water's surface and one breath if you're in the water with it can be deadly. Sources of carbon monoxide on your boat may include engines, gas generators, cooking ranges, and space and water heaters. Early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include eye irritation, headache, nausea, weakness, and dizziness. Knowing these signs and what to do to prevent them can help you stay alive. Install and maintain a carbon monoxide detector on your boat. Turn off the boat's engine and other carbon monoxide producing equipment when anchored. Maintain a fresh circulation of air through and around your boat at all times. Avoid areas of your boat where exhaust fumes may be present. Do not let anyone swim under or around the boarding platform.
- Wearing a life jacket can increase your chances of survival drastically, so when swimming, wading, floating, or playing in open water please wear a life jacket that fits you properly. Some people say that you cannot swim in a life jacket, but that is not true. The belt-style, inflatable life jacket that you manually inflate is ideal for swimmers in open water. All you have to do is wear it and when you need it pull the inflation cord, let it inflate, and put it over your head. An oral inflation tube is provided on all inflatable life jackets as a backup inflation device. Non- or weak swimmers should not wear an inflatable life jacket. There are other styles of comfortable life jackets that they can wear including vest styles that come in many different sizes and colors.

For more water safety information visit www.PleaseWearIt.com and follow Please Wear It on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Remember, "Life Jackets Worn...Nobody Mourns."

USACE is one of the nation's leading federal providers of outdoor and water-based recreation, managing more than 400 lake and river projects in 43 states and hosting some 260 million visits per year. With 90 percent of these recreation areas within 50 miles of metropolitan areas, they provide a diverse range of outdoor activities close to home and to people of all ages. For more information on USACE recreation sites and activities, visit www.CorpsLakes.us.