

Boating & Water Safety Media Interview Fact Sheet – Updated 5/7/2024 Created by USACE National Operations Center (NOC) for Water Safety

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is the nation's leading federal providers of water-related outdoor recreation, hosting millions of visits annually to its more than 400 lake and river projects. We want all our visitors to enjoy their stay, play it safe, and return home alive to the ones they love.

Knowing some of the facts about drowning may help save your life or the life of someone you love. According to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers ten-year public recreation fatality statistics, 88% were male, 86% were 18 and older, and 89% were not wearing a life jacket. Forty-seven percent were associated with swimming in areas not designated for swimming and twenty-one percent were associated with falls from boats, docks, and shoreline.

TIP: It is always important to wear a life jacket when in, on, or near open water (rivers, lakes, etc.). Keep in mind that there are drop-offs, currents, and underwater debris that make swimming in open water very different than swimming at a beach or pool and wearing a life jacket drastically increases your chances of survival, so when swimming or wading at a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers lake please wear a life a jacket and don't ask others to do anything that might make them exceed their swimming ability and drown. Remember, Life Jackets Worn...Nobody Mourns.

TIP: Learn to swim well and swim with a buddy. It only takes an average of 20 seconds for a child to drown and 60 seconds for an adult. Never let your children swim by themselves. Adult supervision is a must to ensure you don't lose the ones you love. Swimming ability decreases with age so even if you are a strong swimmer wear your life jacket especially in open water conditions.

TIP: Many people who drown never intended to enter the water and they drown within 10-30 feet of safety. Most of the time people who drown were either witnessed by someone or there were people in the area that could have helped save them.

TIP: Learn to identify the four signs of a person who is drowning. The drowning signs are head back, mouth open, no sound and arms slapping the water in an up and down motion.

TIP: The proper ways to rescue someone in the water that is in distress is to reach, throw, row, don't go. Reach something out to the person without endangering yourself, throw them something that floats, row your boat close to the person with the motor off. Never attempt an in-water rescue unless you are trained to do so. Instead, go for help or send someone else for help. Oftentimes a double drowning occurs when someone enters the water to attempt a rescue because a person fighting for their life is extremely strong and to stay afloat, they will hold the person who is trying to help them underwater.

TIP: Take a boater safety course and boat with a buddy. According to the U.S. Coast Guard 74% of the people that died in a boating accident were on vessels where the operator had not taken a NASBLA-approved boater safety course. There are on-line courses available at www.boatus.org/free, www.boat-ed.com. U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary <http://cgaux.org/boatinged> and U.S. Power Squadrons (a.k.a. America's Boating Club) www.americasboatingclub.org offer courses in most states. As a bonus, many insurance companies offer reduced rates for taking a boating safety course.

Extra Messages, if time allows:

- Cold water immersion can kill. A sudden unexpected fall into cold water causes an involuntary gasp (or torso) reflex, which can lead to your last breath being of water, instead of air.
- When underwater and under the influence of alcohol or drugs you can suffer from an inner ear condition (caloric labyrinthitis) that causes you to become disoriented and not know which way is up. Also, you can develop "boater's hypnosis" a condition in response to sun, wind, noise, vibration, and motion, which causes fatigue and slows your reaction time. Combining that condition with alcohol or drugs greatly reduces your coordination, judgment, and reaction time, which could lead to deadly consequences.

Summary: Tips that will keep you and the ones you love alive include take a boating safety course, learn to swim well, swim & boat with a buddy, learn how to identify a drowning victim, and know what you can do to rescue them. The most important thing you can do while recreating in or around open water is to wear a life jacket and encourage others to wear theirs too.