

Recreational Boating Safety

Partner Resources - April



While outside temperatures are warming up, it's important to remind boaters that many of Washington's waterways stay cold year-round. **Cold Water Shock** is a potentially life-threatening physiological response you cannot control when exposed to water below 60 degrees. Cold water shock is a danger to boaters of all types, and recreators who recreate near water.

Cold Water Shock can be fatal, regardless of swim ability. The best way to protect yourself from Cold Water Shock is to wear a life jacket at all times while out on the water.

Cold Water responses take place over 5 stages:

- **Stage 1 - Cold-water Shock:** Initial cold shock occurs in the first three to five minutes of accidentally falling overboard. Cold water shock may cause immediate involuntary gasping, hyperventilation, vertigo, and panic — all of which can result in water inhalation and death from drowning.
- **Stage 2 - Swim failure:** Short-term immersion swim failure occurs three to 30 minutes following a fall overboard into cold water. The muscles and nerves in the arms and legs cool quickly. Even strong swimmers can lose the strength necessary to pull themselves out of the water or even keep their head above water.
- **Stage 3 - Hypothermia:** Long-term immersion hypothermia may set in after 30 minutes, depending on water temperature, clothing, body type and behavior in the water. Hypothermia occurs when the body loses heat faster than it produces, cooling vital organs. Hypothermia can eventually lead to loss of consciousness and death, with or without drowning.
- **Stage 4 - Circum-rescue Collapse:** Once rescued, people are still in danger of cardiac arrest. In addition, inhaled water can damage lungs, and heart problems can develop as cold blood from arms and legs is released into the body's core.

Sources: Dr. Frank Golden and Professor Michael Tipton, cold-water survival experts.

Safety Tips for Recreators

- Wear a life jacket. Make sure everyone wears an appropriate, properly fitted and U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket, including experienced swimmers. Learn more about life jackets.
- Try not to panic if you have fallen into the water. Stay afloat with the help of a life jacket, regain control of breathing and try to self-rescue or keep your head above water in view of rescuers. Learn tips for surviving cold-water immersion.
- Carry two forms of communications equipment that will work while wet (whistle, VHF radio, person locator beacon, flares, or waterproof cellphone) so you can call for help in an emergency.
- Know the weather forecast before you set out (warnings, winds, waves, tides, currents, etc.). Wind is a crucial factor as it contributes to capsizing and swamping.
- Increase buoyancy. If you are in the water with others, huddle together with everyone facing inward to help all stay afloat and keep warm.

Recreational Boating Safety

Partner Resources - April



Example Social Media Posts:

- Did you Know? Cold water shock is dangerous even for strong swimmers. Wearing a life jacket can help save your life. #WearIt #lifejacketsSAVElives
- Surprise exposure to cold water can be fatal – wear a life jacket to keep yourself safe! #WearIt #lifejacketsSAVElives
- Temperatures might be rising, but Washington waters stay dangerously cold year-round. #WearIt #lifejacketsSAVElives
- Protect yourself from Cold Water Shock by wearing a life jacket anytime you're on the water. #WearIt #lifejacketsSAVElives
- Life jackets save lives! If a boater is wearing one, their chance of survival from capsizing or falling overboard will dramatically increase. #WearIt #lifejacketsSAVElives

Need More Information?

- [National Center for Cold Water Safety](#)
- [Boat U.S. Foundation: Cold-water boating](#)
- [National Water Safety Congress: Cold-water facts](#)
- [Cold Water Boot Camp: 1-10-1 Principle](#)
- [U.S. Army: Tips to survive a fall into cold water](#)

Photos & Graphics

We've provided a few photos for your use along with this email, but there are many resources online for images to use with credit.

U.S. Coast Guard photo library: <https://uscg-boating.org/multimedia/gallery>

Boat Beat photo library: <https://boatbeat.org/photo-library/>

National Safe Boating Council <https://www.safeboatingcouncil.org/resources/photo-library/>

Tips for Success on Social Media:

- Use photos and visuals! Research shows that posts including interesting visual assets earn more engagement.
- Post messages repeatedly during the month to reinforce the message and reach a wider audience.
- To supplement posts, consider sharing or retweeting content from others in the boating safety community.

Through repeated exposure to safety messaging, we can promote boating safety practices with the intention of reducing fatal boating accidents in the state. We'll provide a monthly toolkit that will support you in sharing key boating safety messages during the boating season. For questions or additional support please contact Ashley.Seydel@parks.wa.gov