



MARINE SAFETY ALERT

Inspections and Compliance Directorate

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Safety Alert 05-96

COLD WATER BOATING ADVISORY

U.S. Coast Guard Marine Safety Office Portland, Maine advises recreational and commercial boaters operating their vessels in spring and early summer that despite the warm weather conditions, sea water temperatures in northern New England waters remain quite cold and present the very real danger of hypothermia in the event of accidental immersion.

Hypothermia is a condition where a body's core temperature is reduced to levels where the individual will experience loss of motor control and in many cases, risk death. In the very cold water conditions found along the northern New England coast, individuals experiencing accidental immersion without full body protection from dry suits or wet suits will experience symptoms of hypothermia usually within a matter of minutes.

The Coast Guard strongly recommends that all persons operating on the water in spring and early summer take steps to minimize the risk of accidental immersion, and to develop a personal emergency plan in the event of immersion, which should include:

- The ability to maintain buoyancy.
- The ability to quickly exit the water.
- The ability to summon assistance if you cannot exit the water.
- The ability to preserve body heat while waiting for assistance.
- The ability to rewarm after exiting the water.

Maintaining Buoyancy: The best way to ensure buoyancy is to wear some type of personal flotation device (PFD) at all times while on or near the water. Your choice of PFD should be based on your size and activity engaged in. Make sure your PFD is comfortable to wear and is in good repair. Some types of PFD-s, such as inflatable flotation coats, are not USCG approved. While these devices may not meet the stringent requirements for your vessel's primary lifesaving equipment, they still might be perfectly adequate to use as a wearable flotation aid.

Exiting the Water: If accidentally immersed in cold water you should immediately remove as much of your body from the water as possible. Ideally, you should attempt to reboard your boat. If your vessel is equipped with a "Kill switch" which stops the engine if you fall overboard make sure it is properly used. You may want to consider towing an emergency boarding ladder behind your vessel to assist in reboarding.

Summoning Assistance: Every boater should have a whistle to summon assistance on their person at all times. If operating at night, every person should be equipped with a floating marker light, preferably a small strobe light. Do not plan on yelling for help, it requires too much precious energy and your ability to yell loudly will fade as your body cools. If operating away from other boats, consider carrying a small personal flare kit to summon assistance. Rewarming after exiting the water: When ever you are near cold water for work or pleasure you should always have a blanket or change of clothes to rewarm your body. Find the time to take a first aid course and learn how to help others who may be experiencing hypothermia.

Preserving Body Heat: When immersed in cold water you must preserve your strength and reduce the flow of cold water across your body. If possible remove any part of your body from the water. Anti-Exposure

Coveralls, which are full body PFD's, are particularly effective in preserving body heat, and provide improved bouyancy too. If possible, wear a wool hat while boating to help preserve heat loss from your head. Take the time to learn cold water survival techniques from the Red Cross or other water safety organization.

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