

Cold Water Safety Tips – Wear it St. Louis!

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ALTON - During the winter season many people tend to spend less time outdoors. For those brave enough to tackle the cold and enjoy recreation on the river, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers St. Louis District urges you to practice boating and water safety.

Here are a few cold water safety tips that could save your life in the event you fall into freezing water.

- All boaters should wear a life jacket and dress for the temperature. Cold-water immersion causes many boating-related fatalities. It follows four stages: (1) cold

shock, (2) swimming failure, (3) hypothermia and (4) post-rescue collapse. Most cold-water drowning fatalities are attributed to the first two stages.

- The initial shock of cold water causes involuntary gasping making it difficult to catch your breath. Many people hyperventilate, faint, and drown before they are able to calm down their breathing.
- The longer you are exposed to cold water, the more you lose your ability to control movement in your extremities. If you are unable to get out of the water in 5-15 minutes, stop moving. Movement will deplete your energy faster and increase heat loss.
- Hypothermia is a condition in which the body loses heat faster than it can produce it. Violent shivering develops, which may give way to confusion and eventually unconsciousness or cardiac arrest.
- Dress warmly with wool clothing and don't discard clothing if you fall into the water. Clothing layers provide warmth that may assist you in fighting hypothermia. This includes shoes and hats. A popular myth is that wet clothes will weigh you down in the water. They are actually only heavy when you are out of the water.
- Wear your life jacket! This helps hold heat into the core areas of your body, and enables you to easily put yourself into the HELP position. HELP (Heat Escape Lessening Posture) by drawing limbs into your body; keep armpits and groin areas protected from unnecessary exposure – a lot of heat can be lost from those areas, as well as the head.

Life jackets save lives and should be worn at all times by anyone who will be in a boat, including those who will be waterfowl hunting or fishing. Statistics show that nearly 90 percent of those who drown were not wearing a life jacket and nearly two-thirds didn't even plan to be in the water.

Visit www.CorpsLakes.us/watersafety for more information that could save your life or the life of someone you love.