

Water Safety Tips – Don't Throw Safety Overboard

Safety Talk

What's at Stake?

Swimming and boating are staples of summer fun. The fun can quickly turn to tragedy though, when water and boating safety are thrown overboard. On average, 1,000 people die in boating-related accidents every year in North America and thousands more are injured. Additionally, more than 3,500 unintentional drownings, not related to boating, happen each year. The majority of these deaths are preventable.

What's the Danger?

- Most boating deaths involve recreational activities and the vast majority of victims are males 15 to 74 years of age.
- Almost 90 percent of boaters were not wearing, or not properly wearing, a lifejacket when they drowned.
- In more than 21 percent of boating deaths, a lifejacket was present on board but was not worn.
- Swimming, unexpected falls at waterfronts and pools, or from a dock, account for thousands of drowning deaths each year.
- The National Safety Council cites drowning as the second-leading cause of death for people between the ages of 5-24.
- In a recent Canadian study, the average age of drowning victims in Canada was 42. The highest death rates were among those 20 to 34 and 65 and older.
- More than 200 children drown in backyard pools every year, and 80 percent of these drownings occur when there is a lack of adult supervision.

- Alcohol consumption plays a role in many water-related accidents and deaths.
- According to the Canadian Red Cross, alcohol is a factor in almost 40 percent of water-related fatalities involving people 15 and older.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) cites alcohol use as the leading contributing factor in fatal boating incidents in the U.S.

How to Protect Yourself

Boating Safety Tips

- Wear a lifejacket:
 - Lifejackets are required by law for each person on board a boat.
 - Properly fitted lifejackets can prevent drownings and should be worn at all times by everyone on the boat.
 - If you operate a boat, it is your responsibility to make sure everyone has and is wearing a properly fitting lifejacket.
- Don't drink alcohol and operate a boat:
 - Alcohol use affects judgment, vision, balance, and coordination.
 - Boating under the influence of alcohol is just as deadly as drinking and driving.
 - Drinking and boating is illegal in all U.S. states and all provinces in Canada.
- Be prepared:
 - Take a course on boating safety.
 - Make sure your boat is in good operational order before each outing.
 - Check gasoline and fluid levels.

- Check the weather forecast. Don't go out on the water if stormy weather is expected. If you see lightning or hear thunder, get to a safe place off the water immediately.

Swimming Safety Tips

- If you don't know how to swim, take swimming lessons.
- Always swim with a buddy.
- Only swim in designated areas and obey all warning flags, signs and lifeguard instructions.
- Make sure your skill level matches the water you're swimming in. Swimming in a river, lake or ocean requires more strength to handle strong currents and waves.
- If you get caught in a current:
 - Don't try to fight it.
 - Stay calm and float with it.
 - Swim parallel to the shore until you can swim free.
- Never dive in shallow water or unfamiliar areas.
- Never drink alcohol when swimming. Just as when boating, alcohol affects your judgment, vision, balance, and coordination.
- Get out of and away from the water immediately if you see lightning or hear thunder.
- Teach children to swim at an early age.
- Actively supervise children near any water. NEVER leave them alone, even for a minute. A child can drown in the time it takes to run inside and grab a drink or answer a phone call.
- Put up proper gates and fencing around backyard pools.
- Empty kiddie pools after each use. A child can drown in just a few inches or centimetres of water.
- Learn cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and rescue techniques.

Final Word

Swimming and boating are two of the most popular summer activities. Don't drown in a sea of regret because you forgot to

practice safe boating and swimming.