

Cold Water Can Kill

Wearing a Lifejacket and Thermal Protection could save your life

It's finally Spring. The days are getting longer, the air carries a sweet fragrance and the ice has receded from the lakes. It's a time when millions of Canadians finally get back their favourite pastime and head out on the water in their boats.

Smartboater.ca was created by the Canadian Safe Boating Council in partnership with the National Search and Rescue Secretariat to remind Canadians to take a few extra precautions to guard against the dangers of a fall into Cold Water.

Many people think that a fall into the water is no big deal. They can climb back onto the dock or swim the short distance to shore, or they can right their overturned boat and get back in. If the boat can't be righted, they can put on their lifejacket and hold onto the boat until help arrives. The reality is when dealing with cold water those goals often can't be reached.

It's hard to imagine what happens should you unexpectedly find yourself in cold water. Dr. Gordon Giesbrecht, Professor of Thermophysiology at the University of Manitoba, has experienced first-hand the effects of cold water. He developed what he calls the 1-10-1 Principle to help you understand how your body will react. You will have One minute to get your breathing under control, as there is an initial gasp response followed by extreme hyperventilation. Ten minutes of meaningful movement before the muscles in your extremities lose their effectiveness, and up to one hour before you lose consciousness due to hypothermia. If you're not wearing a lifejacket and survive the initial shock and gasp, you have very little time before their arms and legs begin to stop functioning, preventing you from staying afloat.

Studies have shown that our bodies lose heat approximately 25 times faster in water than in air of the same temperature. If you are wearing thermal protection such as a neoprene wetsuit, paddling dry suit or a floater coat/suit, it will help keep you warmer for a greater length of time.

Should your boat capsize and you find yourself in the water, try to reduce the rate of heat loss by climbing onto the overturned hull or any other floating object such as a cooler. If none are immediately available, remain as motionless as possible to allow your skin to warm a thin layer of water around your body. Thrashing in the water not only disturbs this layer of warmer water but also accelerates heat loss. If you are alone, tuck your legs and fold your arms across your chest in the HELP (Heat Escape Lessening Position) to protect your vital organs. If you are with others, huddle together interlacing your arms and legs and pressing your torsos together to preserve body heat.

One of the big questions is whether to stay with the boat or swim to shore. You should only consider swimming for shore if you are wearing a lifejacket, your chances for

rescue are very slim and the distance to shore is manageable. (Be aware that the effort involved in swimming will increase heat loss and adversely affect muscle movement.)

Keeping these considerations in mind and taking proactive steps to protect against the dangers of a fall into Cold Water will go far towards making your boating activities safer and more enjoyable. Remember too that, in Canada, many of our larger bodies of water remain cold throughout the summer.

Whether you use a power boat, sail boat, personal watercraft, canoe, kayak or fishing boat, find more information on a variety of boating safety tips by visiting www.SmartBoater.ca.