You Must Fight to Survive in Cold Water

Cold water immersion can kill in several ways, and most victims die before they become hypothermic. If wearing a life jacket, the 1-10-1 principle may save your life.

1 Minute
- Get breathing under control.

10 Minutes of meaningful movement
- Assess the situation and make a plan.
- Perform most important functions first, such as locating other party members.
- Self-rescue if possible.
- Practice emergency communications and signaling.

1 Hour (or more) of useful consciousness
- Focus on slowing heat loss.

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Life Jacket Options

Hunting safety only takes a little bit of planning and preparation. A waterfowl life jacket can go a long way toward bringing hunters home.

- Life jacket designs have come a long way over the years and now come in a wide variety of styles and colors, including inflatables.
- Foam-filled life jackets keep you afloat and add extra insulation.

For full details on life jacket types and requirements, visit mndnr.gov/boatingsafety or see the Minnesota Boating Guide.
Safety on the Water

A safe hunt is a successful hunt:

- State law requires a U.S. Coast Guard-approved wearable life jacket for each person on board all watercraft. Wearing a life jacket is the single best way to avoid a drowning incident while on the water.
- All children under 10 years old are required to wear a Coast Guard-approved life jacket while a boat is underway.
- Don’t overload your boat.
- Avoid alcohol. Booze and boating don’t mix.
- Dress for the water temperature not the actual air temperature.
- Weather can change at any moment. Some of the worst storms strike when least expected. Strong winds and waves could capsize a craft or send a boater overboard. Bad weather in Minnesota usually comes from a westerly direction.
- Make sure the boat has enough fuel. No boater wants to be stranded on the water.
- Carry a cell phone or VHF radio for emergency communication, but keep in mind you may not have service in a remote area.
- Take a boater safety course and receive a boater education certificate.

Avoid Common Mistakes

- Lack of life jacket use. Between 2008 and 2012, boating accidents killed 70 people in Minnesota. Fifty-nine of those who died were not wearing a life jacket.
- Overloading a boat. Too much gear could cause a boat to capsize or swamp. Comply with capacity plate.
- Sudden shift in weight. Quick movement can cause a boater to fall overboard or a boat to capsize.
- Hunting during rough water or stormy conditions.
- Cold water immersion. Falling into icy water can be deadly, because many boaters do not think about the effects of cold water immersion.
- Crossing large bodies of open water.

Prepare Before Heading Out

Preparation is the first step in planning a safe hunt:

- Be prepared by acquainting yourself with the area.
- Tell someone where you are hunting and when you will be back.
- Hunt with a companion or group, staying within visual or voice contact. Boating safety increases with numbers.
- Keep an eye on the sky. No boater should ever start out in a storm. Check the forecast before heading out on the water.
- Get information about water levels from the DNR website or area DNR office.

Stay With The Boat

If you do fall out or capsize, stay with your boat and try to reboard.

- Most capsize watercraft can still float.
- A boat in the water is much easier for rescuers to find.
- If you have to remain in the water, do not attempt to swim unless it is to a nearby boat or floating object.
- Keep boots and clothes on. Almost all clothing, even hip boots and waders, will float for an extended period of time.

Use The H.E.L.P. Position

Reduce the effects of cold water immersion by assuming the heat escape lessening position (H.E.L.P.).

- Cross ankles.
- Cross arms over chest.
- Hands should be kept high on the shoulders or neck.
- Draw knees to chest.
- Lean back and try to relax.

This maneuver should be tried in a pool before depending on it in an emergency.

Huddle Up For Warmth

If more than one person is in the water and all are wearing life jackets, the “huddle” is recommended.

- This is where small groups of two to four “hug” with chests closely touching.
- Arms should be placed around the backs of the others and kept underwater, while smaller individuals or children can be placed in the middle of the huddle.
- The huddle helps to conserve body heat and it is easier for rescuers to locate than one lone victim. Also, the close proximity of victims can serve as a significant morale booster.