



Overloading and too little freeboard is an invitation to capsizing and the most common cause of waterfowler drownings.

Waterfowlers seldom think of themselves as boaters. After all, isn't a boat simply a means to cross the slough to the blind and set out decoys? Why bother with life jackets and boat cushions that take up space that could be used for extra decoys, dogs, guns, and a million things that duck hunters deem essential? The reason is simple. Hunters drown needlessly every year because they spend more time getting the perfect camouflage paint job on their boat, than making certain they have the necessary equipment and skills to survive in an emergency.

EIGHT COMMON FACTORS

In a review of ten separate accidents resulting in 14 waterfowl hunter deaths in Minnesota, eight factors common to hunting boat fatalities become apparent:

- Waterfowlers are more likely to drown in a boating accident than be shot in a firearms mishap.
- None of the victims were wearing a personal flotation device (PFD), and only one even had a flotation cushion in the boat.
- 2/3 were men between 18 and 23 years of age. Possibly because young men are more likely to take greater risks, and generally have less experience than older hunters.

- All of the accidents were a result of the boat capsizing or swamping due to overloading, sudden shifts in weight, or weather conditions.
- All but one happened under cold, stormy conditions in the later half of the season.
- 60% were in canoes or boats 12' and under.
- Hypothermia (loss of body heat due to immersion in cold water) was a contributing cause of most of these deaths.
- More waterfowl hunter drownings occur on small sloughs than big lakes, possibly because big water hunters use larger, more stable boats, and are more likely to carry and wear PFDs.

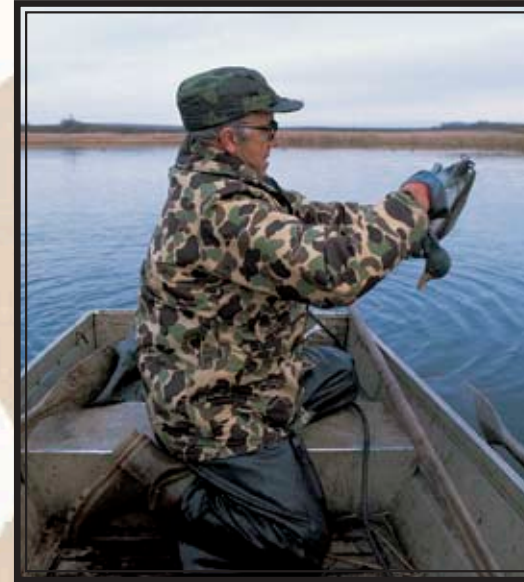
PFDs: PREVENT FOOLISH DROWNINGS

What can we do then, to avoid some of the hazards that befall too many hunters each year?

The first and most important tip is to wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved personal flotation device (PFD) while traveling to and from your blind. A PFD can make a difference between life or death for a hunter who falls into cold water. Camouflage models are available in both the Type III vest and full sleeve "float coat" varieties, and both should offer adequate flotation and considerable protection against hypothermia in case you make an "unscheduled water landing." Other camo PFDs allow the wearer to shoot without removing the vest.



By keeping knees bent in a seated position, enough air is trapped in shin of waders or hip boots to keep you afloat for hours, even if you forget to put on your PFD! In this position, boots will NOT turn a practiced individual upside down.



People on board boats used for duck hunting are legally required to wear, or have readily accessible, a Coast Guard approved wearable personal flotation device (PFD or life vest.) PFDs come in a variety of hunting styles including camouflage vests, coveralls, and the float coat shown.

OVERLOADING: AN INVITATION TO TRAGEDY

Boats used for hunting should be checked to see if they will float when filled with water. All modern outboard boats have a capacity plate that indicates the maximum outboard motor horsepower as well as the carrying capacity of the boat. This is a good way to determine whether or not your boat is large enough for the gear you wish to transport. Any attempt to overload will result in a dangerous loss of freeboard, and too little freeboard is an invitation to the first large wave to swamp your boat.

Hunting boats are typically small craft (under 14'), and many have flat bottoms which are particularly unsuitable for rough water. Hunters should avoid crossing large open bodies of water and stay as close to shore as possible when traveling to and from hunting locations.

Make sure you have enough fuel. Take into account that your motor will use more gasoline when hunting than on a summer fishing trip. Decoys, dogs, and shells weigh more than fishing rods and tackle boxes, and will demand more power (and gasoline) from your outboard.

THE GALES OF NOVEMBER

Keep an eye on the weather. All but one of the waterfowling boat fatalities in a seven year period happened after October 21, and in windy or stormy weather. Four hunters were lost in one storm in 1984, and in the infamous Armistice Day Storm of 1940, hundreds of hunters were stranded and scores drowned when boats capsized or swamped in six foot waves whipped by 50 MPH winds. Don't let bluebird weather at the start of a hunting trip lull your judgment, and be sure to get an up-to-date weather forecast.

With practice, you can float in hip boots or waders, even if you forget to put on your PFD! If you keep your legs bent in a seated position, enough air is trapped in the shin area of the boot to keep you afloat for hours. You can then propel yourself backwards to return to your boat. Waders do not turn the practiced wearer upside down, and even when filled with water, they will not pull you to the bottom and do offer protection from hypothermia.

As mentioned before, hypothermia is a factor in most duck hunter fatalities. Since water conducts heat 25 times faster than air of the same temperature, it is important to keep as much of your body out of the water as possible. If you unexpectedly enter cold water (any water less than 70° is considered cold), immediately attempt to reenter the boat. This will minimize the effects of hypothermia, and greatly increase your chances for survival. Do not remove your clothing unless it's absolutely necessary, since even wet clothing holds body heat in like a diver's wet suit.



Buoyancy of duck decoys, combined with the flotation provided by air trapped in hip boots can save your life.



The "Huddle" has three advantages: body heat is shared, it is easier for rescuers to spot a group than individuals floating, and morale is boosted by communication with others in the group.

H.E.L.P. YOURSELF

If you fall in while wearing a PFD and decide not to swim for shore, and can't get back into your swamped boat, you can reduce the effects of hypothermia by assuming the heat escape lessening position (H.E.L.P.). Cross ankles, cross arms over chest, draw knees to chest, lean back and try to relax. This head out of the water, fetal position reduces body heat flow to the water by at least 50%. It should, however, be tried in a pool before depending on it. Note that the hands should be kept high on the shoulders or neck. If kept out of the water, the hands will stay warmer and more flexible — an important factor in self rescue.

If more than one person is in the water and wearing PFDs, the "huddle" is recommended. This is where small groups of two to four "hug" with chest closely touching chest. Your 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 "sandwich." The huddle helps to conserve body heat and it is also easier for rescuers to locate than one lone victim. The close proximity of victims can serve also as a significant morale booster.

Studies have shown that 97 percent of all non-PFD wearing adult males can float motionlessly, hands stretched behind their heads, with faces out of the water for long periods. If large waves prevent floating on the back, a non-PFD wearing individual should keep their head out of

the water and slowly tread water or dog paddle. The operative word here is slowly. Excess movement such as swimming or thrashing about, accelerates heat loss and encourages hypothermia. Unconsciousness can occur in as little as 15 minutes in very cold water, and death follows unconsciousness.

ALCOHOL: THE DEADLY COMPANION

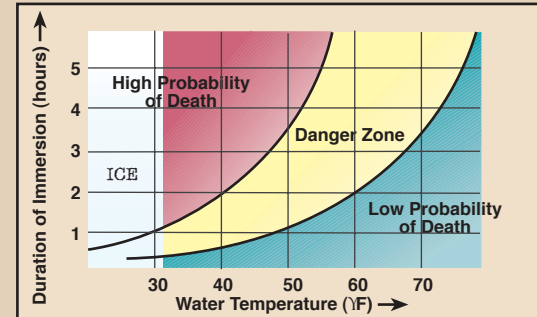
When hunting, alcoholic beverages should be avoided. Besides increasing the possibility of a firearms accident, even "just a couple of swallows" can seriously impair judgment, increase risk taking, and reduce visual awareness. Contrary to what many people believe, alcoholic beverages don't warm you up, but actually serve to speed up cooling and bring on hypothermia.

TORSO REFLEX: YOUR LAST GASP

If you know you are about to fall into cold water, cover your face with your hands and hold your breath. Anyone who has ever gotten into a cold shower knows the effects of the "Torso Reflex," also called cold water shock. This is your automatic gasp for air in response to being hit in the chest area with cold water. If your mouth is under water when this gasp occurs, drowning is the most probable outcome, for someone not wearing a PFD.



Effects of hypothermia are reduced by assuming the heat escape lessening position or H.E.L.P. (Note hands protecting neck.)



The Danger Zone indicates where safety precautions and appropriate behavior (adapting H.E.L.P.) can increase your chances of survival when immersed in cold water.

The outcome of any hunting trip should be a limit of fun, but fun does not have to mean unsafe. Hunting safety only takes a little bit of planning, foresight, and diligence — some waterfowling PFD that can go a long way toward helping all hunters home.



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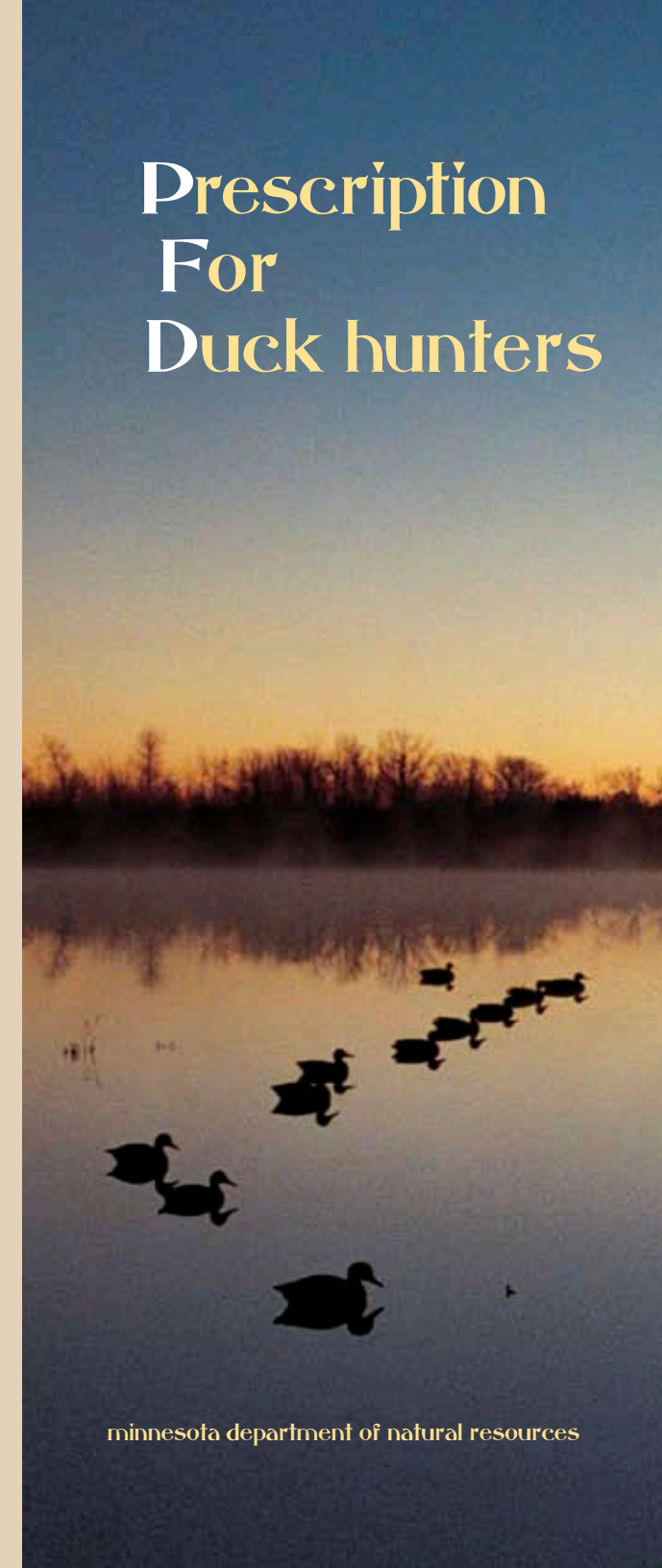
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PFD

Prescription For Duck hunters



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