

Safety tips for the early boating season (April-May)

The DNR knows Minnesotans want to take advantage of the water opening up, but we want to remind boaters to not let their guard down, because water temperatures can be deadly this time of year.

Thirty percent of boating fatalities occur in cold water, most often because the boater fell overboard or the boat capsized, and the boater was not wearing a life jacket.

To stay safe during the early boating season:

- Don't just bring a life jacket, wear it. If you do fall overboard, a foam-filled life jacket or float coat will help keep you warm.
- Stay low in the boat and avoid quick movement to prevent falling overboard. Falling into cold water can cause an immediate involuntary gasp for air, and the shock of the icy water can also cause cardiac arrest, even for people in good health.
- Keep an eye on the weather. It can change suddenly, and some of the worst storms strike when least expected. Strong winds and waves could capsize a craft or send a boater overboard. With the late thaw, ice or ice chunks could also be an issue on several lakes. Bad weather in Minnesota usually comes from the west.
- Prevent your boat from sinking or capsizing by not overloading it. If your boat becomes swamped or capsizes, stay with it if possible and wait for rescue. Most boats will continue to float, even after capsizing and filling with water. Drowning often occurs when the victim tries to swim to shore.
- Do not drink and boat. Fifty percent of boating fatalities involve alcohol.
- Do not go boating alone; boating safety increases with numbers.
- Tell someone where you are going before you go out on the water.
- Dress for the water temperature, not the air temperature. Warm air does not mean warm water.
- Take a boater course and receive a boat education certificate.