COLD WATER IMMERSION

Through the Docktalk program, FOCA encourages landowners to be informed about the hazards of cold water immersion.

Even in summer, cold water immersion is a hazard in Ontario lakes

Many people don't realize that even though the warmer weather is here, the dangers of cold water immersion continue all year round. Many of the lakes in Ontario are considered cold for safety purposes even in summer. The best way to be safe when boating in cold water is to be informed and prepared.

A situation can become dangerous very quickly

A dangerous misconception is that strong swimmers will manage to swim to safety or tread water until help arrives.

Regardless of your swimming ability or physical fitness, sudden immersion in cold water and the gasp reflex will cause you to hyperventilate. As your body tries to conserve energy in the core, your limbs will become weak and unresponsive. Slipping beneath the surface leads to aspiration of water into the lungs and the rapid onset of severe hypothermia. In a matter of minutes, disorientation and exhaustion will put the victim at great risk of drowning. To view first-hand accounts of people who tried the Canadian Safe Boating Council and Lifesaving Society's Cold Water Boot Camp, visit :
http://www.coldwaterbootcamp.com/pages/home.html.

Here are some precautions you can take to stay safe when boating in cold water:

1. Always **wear** your life jacket (don't just bring it with you)! A life jacket will allow you to rest in a position that conserves body heat (hugging knees to chest). A bright coloured lifejacket will help make you more visible to rescuers. Attach a whistle to your life jacket - a whistle will enable you to signal for help with less exertion than shouting.

2. Get out of the water quickly. Water draws heat from your body much more quickly than cold air. Climb onto anything nearby (e.g. overturned boat) to get out of the water.

3. Tell someone on shore about your boating plans before you head out on the water, including your route and when to expect your return.

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