



Open Water

Many Canadians will participate in activities on the open water this summer.

Sadly, tragic and preventable water-related fatalities occur each year. An average of 400 Canadians drown each year, and a Red Cross research report examining 10 years of drowning statistics showed that young children ages 1 to 4 and men ages 15 to 44 are at the greatest risk of drowning. Often, the risk of water-related injury or death when in, on or near the water is far greater than perceived. There are several steps that swimmers and boaters can take to stay safe when in, on, or around the water.

TIPS:

Never underestimate the power of currents. A boater, swimmer or wader in open water who underestimates the power of currents can be swept away instantly.

- Open water is very different than swimming in a pool – distance is deceiving, and you often have to contend with cold water, waves, currents, drop offs, sandbars, water visibility, undertows, and underwater obstacles, as well as motorcrafts.



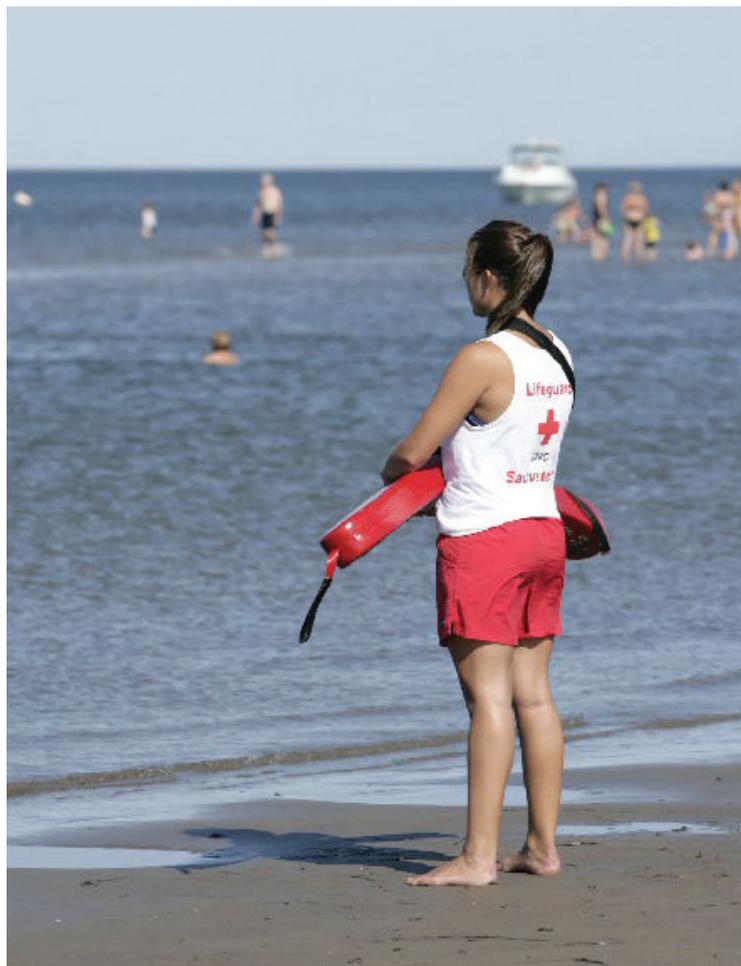
- River currents, especially when concentrated around rocks, bridge pilings, and in hydraulics at the base of dams, have enormous power and can easily trap even strong swimmers.
- If you become caught in a river current or fast moving water, roll onto your back and go downstream feet first to avoid hitting obstacles head first. When you are out of the strongest part of the current, swim straight toward shore.
- If your boat has overturned, hang on to the upstream end of the boat.

Always swim with a buddy and check the weather conditions before venturing into the water.

- Be aware of currents, water temperature, and depth when swimming in open water.
- Wind and waves frequently come up suddenly, posing a major threat for swimmers and boaters far from sheltered waters in lakes and on the ocean. Advance verification and ongoing observation of weather conditions is essential.
- Obey signs and signals (such as flags) posted on the beach which indicate whether the water is safe to enter.

Lifejackets are like seat belts – they only work if you wear them, and wear them properly.

- Each year, more than 160 tragic and preventable boating-related fatalities occur across Canada.
- Nearly 90 per cent of boaters who drown are not wearing, or are not properly wearing, their lifejacket.



- Alcohol was present or suspected for at least 41 per cent of powerboat drownings.
- A Red Cross report examining 10 years of drowning trends concludes that if all adult men wore a lifejacket or PFD, up to 90 per cent of all boating-related drownings would be prevented.
- It's not enough to have a lifejacket on board. It is unrealistic and unsafe to assume that a boater will be able to retrieve and properly secure a flotation device while falling overboard, capsizing or colliding with another boat or object.