



WATERFOWLING

Staying Afloat When You're Out in Your Boat



PHOTO COURTESY STEARNS

LOADING YOUR BOAT: STRIKING THE RIGHT BALANCE

When loading gear, hand the gear to someone in the boat, or leave it on the pier and reach for it from the boat. It is important to distribute the weight

to load too much in the back (stern). Additionally, it is important to keep the center of gravity low in the boat. Piling gear high can raise the center of gravity and can cause the boat to tip over unexpectedly.

Hunters are far more likely to die from drowning than from a gunshot wound.

evenly around the boat, making sure not to overload. Take special care not

And as you are loading, be sure you have brought along a life jacket for each person aboard—it's the law. Better yet, have everyone in your group put on the life jackets before even leaving the dock.

HYPOTHERMIA AND HUNTERS

If the worst happens, why not be prepared? Here are some things you can do in advance to give yourself a better chance for survival if you do end up in the water. First of all, dress for the water temperature, not for the air temperature. Having lots of layers on will help you survive if you do end up in the water. Secondly, wear a hat. When in the water, 50% percent of your heat could be lost through your head—the hat will help slow down heat loss. Eat high energy foods and carry a candy bar in your pocket; if you fall in, you'll be glad to have the extra energy. Bring extra clothes in a dry bag or garbage bag and keep them in the boat just in case someone in your party gets wet.

Any victim pulled from cold water should be treated for hypothermia. Symptoms may include intense shivering, loss of coordination, mental confusion, cold and blue (cyanotic) skin, weak pulse, irregular heartbeat, and enlarged pupils. Once shivering stops, core body temperature begins to drop critically. Try to prevent body cooling and get the victim to a medical facility immediately.

WHILE WAITING FOR HELP TO ARRIVE:

- Gently move the victim to a warm shelter.
- Check for breathing and a heartbeat. Start CPR if necessary.
- If you have dry clothes or a blanket, remove the victim's wet clothes. Use a minimum of body movement, since rough handling can cause cardiac arrest. Cut the clothes off, if necessary.
- Lay the victim in a level face-up position with a blanket or some other insulation underneath.
- Wrap the victim in a dry blanket or dry clothes. If possible, warm the clothes first. If a stocking cap is available, put it on the victim's head since a great deal of heat is lost from the head.
- If the person is awake and coherent, give them warm (not hot) liquids. Warm tea with sugar or honey or slightly cooled hot chocolate are good since sugars can still be absorbed even if the stomach has shut down.
- Never give a hypothermic person alcohol. Alcohol dilates (opens) your veins, which will make you lose body heat more rapidly.



PHOTO COURTESY STEARNS

Many hunters do not consider themselves to be "boaters." They consider the boat to simply be a shooting platform or a way to get to the blind. However, hidden dangers may lie below the surface or above in the form of inclement weather and fog. Boating safety is especially critical to waterfowlers. Here are some very important things to consider.

To avoid overloading the boat, check the vessel's capacity plate. The capacity plate states the total amount of weight (including people, gear and motor) the boat is made to hold.

Hunters should stay seated while shooting so they can brace themselves for the gun's recoil. Standing up in an unstable boat will raise the center of gravity and only make the boat less predictable. When setting decoys, be careful not to lean too far over the sides of the boat.

IF THERE'S NO HELP AVAILABLE:

- Apply heating pads or hot water bottles under the blanket to the head, neck, chest, and groin. Be careful not to burn the victim's skin.
- If these are unavailable, use your own body warmth to warm the victim. Wrap yourself and the victim in a blanket together and use as much body to body contact as possible.
- Do not apply heat to the arms and legs. This forces cold blood from the arms and legs back toward the heart, lungs and brain, lowering core body temperature and causing "after drop" which can be fatal.
- Do not massage the victim or give the victim a hot bath. Cardiac arrest is a frequent result of hypothermia, and moving the victim roughly can be a catalyst for this condition.
- Do not give food or drink to unconscious victims.

LIFE JACKETS

Several styles stand out as being minimally bulky but highly effective. One is the inflatable, which has very little bulk until you pull the cord, or it hits the water and becomes inflated by a small CO2 cartridge. This vest has two narrow panels down the front and webbing in back, and comes in dark colors, tan, and camo patterns like "Shadow Grass," "Wetlands" and others. An even less noticeable life saving device is another inflatable vest; this one is worn stashed in a small pouch around the hunter's waist. If the hunter needs the vest, he can pull a tab and the jacket will automatically inflate, he can then slip the jacket over his head. The pouch also comes in dark and camo colors so it does not stand out against clothing.



PHOTO COURTESY STEARNS



PHOTO COURTESY SOSPENDERS

VESTS AND COATS

Some life jackets provide warmth as well as flotation. There are hunting jackets, sometimes called "float coats." Float coats have the foam built right into the jacket, so regular life jackets don't have to be worn. The jackets are water-proof, and the foam helps retain warmth. (They don't inflate.) Additionally, many of the vest styles, which come in camouflage, tan, and green, are thick enough to provide some warmth. Some have side pockets for warming hands and zipper pouches for ammo or other small gear. Another vest style, similar to a popular fishing style, uses netting around the shoulders, back and upper chest to give the hunter as much freedom of movement as possible when shooting. Jackets can be purchased at outdoors stores, such as Cabela's.



PHOTO COURTESY STEARNS



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Being a conscientious boater will ensure that you are waterfowl hunting for years to come. That's why groups like the NRA, Ducks Unlimited, North American Hunter, Stearns, and Cabela's have joined forces to promote safe boating. For more information, go to www.boatus.com/foundation.

STEARNS



Cabela's



BE PREPARED TO TAKE THE PLUNGE

If you go overboard, try to hold onto something that floats. If you are wearing a life preserver, great. If there are more floating in the water, grab those too to use as floats. Even decoys can be used, one under each arm, to keep you floating. Try to hold onto your boat, or even right the boat and climb inside (some boats are inherently buoyant and float even when filled with water). The idea is to get as much of your body out of the water as possible, so there is less area that can lose heat.

Conserve what heat you can. Tighten up your jacket, vest, shoes, whatever you are wearing. The water trapped inside your layers of clothes will warm up from your body heat and act as a wetsuit. Do not remove clothing!

Do not try to swim unless it is to reach a nearby boat, another person, or a floating object on which you can climb or use for floatation. Swimming pumps out the warm water trapped between your skin and your clothes and brings in colder water. Swimming can also cause debilitating cramps. Furthermore, the movement pumps warm blood to your extremities, where it cools quickly. Swimming can reduce your survival time by almost 50%. Stay as still as possible, no matter how painful. Intense shivering and severe pain in cold water are natural reflexes that will not kill you, but cold water can. Getting into the "H.E.L.P." position (explained below) may help you keep your cold arms and legs still.

H.E.L.P.

This position, the Heat Escape Lessening Position, or H.E.L.P., aims to protect some of the areas of your body most prone to heat loss: the head, neck, sides of the chest cavity and the groin area, and if you are wearing a life jacket, it can be very effective. To reach this position, you should bring your knees up as close as possible to your chest and grasp your hands together over your calves. If this is too difficult, or too unstable, cross your calves, bend your knees and pull your legs close to your body. Cross your arms and tuck your hands flat under your armpits.



PHOTO COURTESY MINNESOTA DNR

FLOATING IN WADERS

If you find yourself floating in the water with waders still on, try to use them to your advantage. Allow some air inside them so they float on the surface, then hold your hands together behind your knees or your neck and float until help arrives. This is most effective if you are wearing a life jacket, otherwise you'll have to use your arms to tread water, or float on your back with your head in the water, which will make you lose heat more quickly.

H.U.D.D.L.E.

When several people are stranded in the water, they should form a huddle. Facing inward, they should link their arms over each other's shoulders or under each other's arms to get as close as possible, to share as much heat as possible. If there are children or seniors along, they should go in the center of the huddle so they can receive warmth front and back. Two or more people huddled together can increase survival time by 50%.



PHOTO COURTESY MINNESOTA DNR

These survival positions are most effective when the person in the water is wearing a life jacket. If the person is not wearing a PFD and is forced to swim, they should do so as slowly as possible. Anything that can be used for flotation—logs, parts of the boat, gas cans, whatever—should be utilized for flotation. The swimmer can also try breathing into his clothing to put air—and hopefully some flotation—into his torso area.



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Be Safe • Be Responsible