

Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection

2015 Press Release

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DEEP Alerts Boaters to Dangers of Hypothermia Cold Waters of Early Spring Pose Risks

Life jackets a key to survival in Spring water temperatures

Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) reminds all boaters that with this weekend's forecast calling for sun and air temperatures in the upper 50's, state waters are still in the 40's meaning that immersion into the water can cause serious injury or death due to hypothermia.

Opening day for the 2015 trout season is tomorrow, April 11th and fisherman and boaters are reminded to dress for the water temperature, not air temperature, said DEEP Boating Division Director Eleanor Mariani. At this time of year, it is more important than ever to take proper safety precautions to minimize the chances of going into the water and to be prepared if you do.

Between 2004 and 2014, 68 people were treated for hypothermia as a result of boating accidents. Of these cases, 52 injuries occurred during Connecticut's cold water months, October thru May.

Boaters are reminded that they are legally required to wear a life jacket while in a manually propelled vessel from October 1 through May 31, said Captain Ryan Healy, DEEP's Environmental Conservation (EnCon) Police. Don't let a fun day of outdoor recreating become a fatal boating statistic, please wear a life jacket.

In 2014 several incidents demonstrated the dangers posed by cold waters and hypothermia:

- A person was pulled from the water unresponsive in April after his vessel capsized at the mouth of Southport Harbor in Fairfield.
- Connecticut had two boating fatalities early in the season. In March a canoe capsized in Long Island Sound, Milford. In May another canoe capsized in LIS, Norwalk, with four males onboard; one male drowned. In both fatalities, life jackets were not worn.

A person immersed in cold water has a much better chance of survival if they are wearing a life jacket. The DEEP reminds all boaters that every vessel must have a proper fitting life jacket for every person aboard, and that children under 13 must be wearing a life jacket at all times while underway, unless the child is below deck or in an enclosed cabin.

To see the effects of cold water immersion and the benefits of wearing a life jacket, access the Cold Water Boot Camp video at: www.coldwaterbootcampusa.org/videos.shtml

Best Management Practices for Safe Boating:

- **Dress for the water temperature not air temperature** - especially when on small boats - temperatures in Long Island Sound are still in the upper 30s; on lakes and ponds they are only in the mid-40s. Ending up in the water when our body temperature is 98.6 degrees can be a huge shock. Someone that falls in the water quickly loses the ability to function. Cold waters also invoke an involuntary gasp reflex - a number one cause of drowning.
- **Check the condition of all water and fuel hoses and their connection points.** Make sure all hose clamps are in good condition. Accidents involving the sinking of a boat or fires onboard are generally a Spring time occurrence. With a little vigilance, these accidents can be prevented.
- **File a Float Plan.** Let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return. Make sure you let the person know you are home safely.
- **Wear Your Life jacket!** - Connecticut joins the National Safe Boating Campaign in its efforts to promote wearing a life jacket. Statistics show that almost three-quarters of the people that died in boating accidents between 2008 and 2012 drowned. Of those, 90% were not wearing a life jacket. Life jackets are more comfortable and lightweight than ever. In manually propelled vessels, life jackets must be worn until May 31. Putting one on before heading out could save your life, so Get It On Connecticut - Wear It!
- **Maintain a proper lookout.** Damaged docks, pilings and trees may be floating down rivers and into the Long Island Sound. Boaters should be especially vigilant when they get out on the water to look for and avoid the floating debris.