SafetyTIPS from Assistant Fire Marshal Doug Jones
An information resource for citizens

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Ice and Cold Water Safety

Each winter, people are injured from exposure in cold water incidents. Cold water is defined as any water that is cooler than normal body temperature (98.6 degrees Fahrenheit). Cold water drains away body heat 25 to 30 times faster than air! Cold water just has to be colder than you are to cause hypothermia. The lower the temperature of the water, the faster the onset of hypothermia can be.

HYPOTHERMIA

What is hypothermia?
Hypothermia is the excessive lowering of body temperature. A drop in core body temperature below 95 degrees F. causes shivering, confusion, loss of muscle strength, and if not treated and reversed, hypothermia leads to unconsciousness and death.

How Can I Prevent Hypothermia?
To prevent hypothermia, wear layers of warm clothing, protect your head and hands from the elements by wearing winter hats and gloves/mittens, keep as dry as possible, always wear a personal floatation device when around cold water, and carry matches in a waterproof container.

Helping Someone with Hypothermia

- Calling for medical help immediately!
- If the situation is safe for you to do so, remove the person from the cold water or cold air.
- Remove wet clothing.
- Keep the victim as dry as possible.
- Wrap the victim in blankets or in a sleeping bag.
- Build a fire to warm the victim.
- Give the victim warm fluids to drink (no alcohol or caffeinated drinks).
- Seat the victim in a warm shower or warm bath with the arms and legs of the victim out of the water. This allows the core of the body to warm first.

"SAFE" ICE

Ice on moving water in rivers, streams, and brooks is never safe. The thickness of ice on ponds and lakes depends upon water currents or springs, depth, and natural objects such as tree stumps or rocks. Daily changes in temperature cause the ice to expand and contract, which affects its strength. Because of these factors, no one can declare the ice to be absolutely "safe".

What if Someone Falls Through the Ice?

- Act quickly and call 911 for help immediately. Make sure properly trained and equipped rescue personnel are alerted to respond.
- DO NOT go out onto the ice. Many times would be rescuers become victims themselves.
- Reach, Throw or Row. Extend a branch, pole or ladder to the victim. Throw them a buoyant object such as a life ring or float tied to a rope. If a boat is nearby row out to the victim or push it toward them.

And Remember…

- Always wear a personal floatation device when boating, any time of year.
- Waterlogged clothing makes it difficult to keep your head above the surface of the water.
- Dress properly.
- Keep your head covered, 50% of body heat is lost through the head. Clothing that is made from man-made fibers does not protect the wearer for long when wet. Wool insulates better from the effects of hypothermia when dry or wet.

If you fall into cold water, bring your knees to your chest, hold your arms to your sides and clasp your hands, and cover your head if possible to protect your body from heat loss. DO NOT try to swim unless a boat, floating object, or the shore is close by. Swimming causes "warm" blood to circulate to your arms and legs, where it cools off quickly and reduces survival time by as much as 35-50%!

It's not about saving lives; it's about saving <u>your</u> life.

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