

Safety Alert - Cold Water Kills

In the past two months, four rowers have died due to cold water immersion. Three died in March in The Netherlands and one died in April in the USA.

These events are most likely at this time of year when the air is getting warmer but the water is still very cold. This is compounded by the fact that we tend to wear less kit now than we do in the winter so if we do enter the water then our skin cools very rapidly.

Rapid skin cooling results in the involuntary gasp response. This isn't just a little gasp, it's a huge gasp that totally fills your lungs. You may experience several of these gasps in a row. If your head is underwater when you gasp, you will immediately drown. One gasp underwater will result in you having enough water in your lungs to kill you.

So, what can you do? Firstly, and obviously, do not fall into the water. Take care: -

- to avoid collisions as these often result in capsizes. Keep a good lookout and keep to the circulation plan;
- when getting into and out of the boat, lots of capsizes occur, even in crew boats simply because there is no-one holding the rigger;
- when doing catch drills and starts, capsizes occur when blades are square in the water at the catch.

What can you do if you do enter the water? Try to: -

- enter the water as gradually as you can. This is not always possible but try;
- keep your head above the water to avoid inhaling water when you gasp;
- keep calm and get your breathing under control;
- remember that it will feel horrible at first but you will feel better later;
- get free of the boat;
- get as much of your body out of the water as soon as you can;
- get off the water without delay;
- re-warm with care, drink warm (not hot) chocolate or a cold, fizzy, sugary drink, the sugar will fuel your re-warming.

Make sure that you stay with the boat, it is your life raft.

An auto inflation lifejacket will help too and it should help you to keep your head above the water when you gasp.

You can learn more from the [Cold Water and Hypothermia training](#) on RowHow.

If you want to know more, or if you think you know it all, then take the challenge at <http://www.respectthewater.com>.

Do not assume you are only at risk when sculling. Of the four recent deaths, one rower was lost from an 80 and three from a 4+.