



# NEWS RELEASE

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

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## Be safe on the water this winter! Cold weather increases risk of hypothermia

**SAVANNAH, Ga.** – The [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Savannah District](#) reminds the public to always wear a life jacket when recreating in, on, or near the water, especially during the winter months when cooler water temperatures increase the risk of hypothermia.

Hypothermia is a condition in which the body loses heat faster than it can produce it. Violent shivering develops, which can lead to confusion and a loss of body movement.

Hypothermia is a significant risk factor for injury or death while boating or fishing. Cold water accelerates the onset and progression of hypothermia, since body heat can be lost 25 times faster in cold water than in cold air. Many suspected drowning victims actually die from cold exposure or hypothermia, according to information released by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Headquarters and the U.S. Coast Guard.

“Wearing a life jacket will greatly increase your chances of survival if you fall into cold water and you face hypothermic conditions,” said Savannah District Park Ranger Erin Parnell. “A lifejacket can make it easier for you to climb back into your boat, swim to safety, or wait for rescue. It also adds warmth around your core and enables you to bring your knees to your chest to reduce the amount of heat that escapes your body while waiting for rescue.”

In the last five years, the Corps’ Savannah District recorded six boating-related fatalities occurring in cooler months at its Savannah River lakes—[Hartwell](#), [Richard B. Russell](#), and [J. Strom Thurmond](#). Only one of the victims was wearing a life jacket. Three of the six cold-weather fatalities occurred in 2011.

Here are some safety tips to remember when recreating at the lake in cooler weather:

If you fall in the water:

- Wear your life jacket! This helps hold heat into the core areas of your body, and enables you to easily put yourself into the HELP position. If wearing a Type I life jacket, the **HELP (Heat Escape Lessening Posture)** is formed by crossing the arms over the chest and pulling legs up to the chest. Keep armpits and groin areas protected from unnecessary exposure; a lot of heat can be lost from those areas, as well as the head.
- If wearing a Type III life jacket, or if the HELP position causes your face to become submerged, bring your arms and legs straight down and hold them tight to your sides while keeping your head tilted back. Whenever possible, keep arms snug to the body under the lifejacket. This is called the **SURVIVAL** position.
- If several people are in the water, huddle together to share body heat until rescue arrives. This is called the **HUDDLE** position.
- Don't discard clothing. Clothing layers provide some warmth that may actually assist you in fighting hypothermia. This includes shoes and hats.

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Other tips:

- Dress warmly with wool clothing.
- Wear rain gear and stay dry.
- Don't drink alcohol while boating or fishing as it may impair your balance, vision, judgment, and reaction time to properly handle a hypothermia situation.
- Seek a warm environment at the first sign (mild shivering) of hypothermia.
- Boaters ALWAYS should use an Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon so that rescuers can find you in the event of an emergency. Emergency beacons are available with an integral GPS navigation receiver that will send accurate location and identification information to rescue authorities immediately.
- Anyone can be at risk of hypothermia, even in warm waters. The expected time of survival can be as little as two hours in waters as warm as 60 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit.

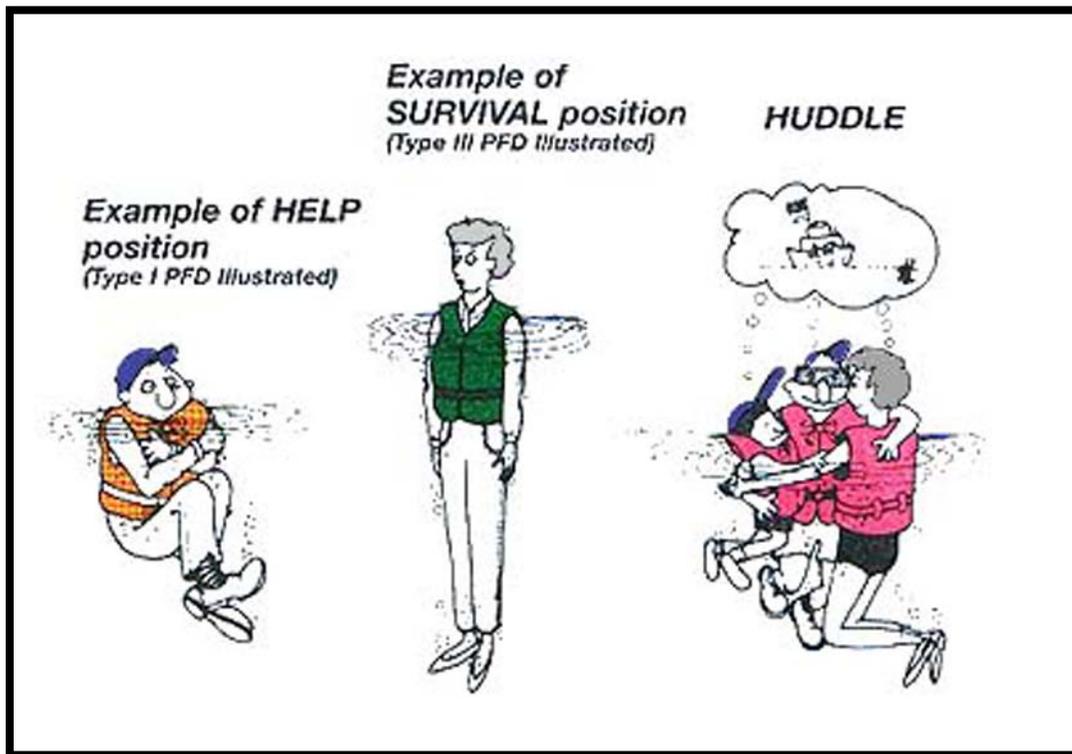


Illustration from the Personal Flotation Device Manufacturers Association (PFDMA)

**ABOUT US:** The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' [Savannah District](#) manages [three lakes and hydroelectric dams](#) along the Savannah River. It also oversees a multi-billion dollar [military construction](#) program at 11 Army and Air Force installations in Georgia and North Carolina. Corps' projects range from barracks, hospitals and clinics to maintenance facilities, headquarters buildings and aircraft hangars. The Savannah District also has oversight and maintains additional civil works projects – from the Savannah and Brunswick harbors to the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway.