

## Water Safety Information

**1. Alcohol and Water Activities Do Not Mix.** More than half of all fatalities involving water activities are alcohol-related.

a. Alcohol has many physical effects on people that directly threaten their safety and well-being when they are involved in activities on or around water.

- (1) Cognitive abilities and judgment deteriorate, making it harder to process information, assess situations, and make good choices.
- (2) Physical performance is impaired, including balance problems, lack of coordination, and increased reaction time.
- (3) Vision is affected. This includes decreased peripheral vision, reduced depth perception, decreased night vision, poor focus, and difficulty distinguishing colors (particularly red and green).
- (4) Inner-ear disturbances can make it impossible for a person who falls into the water to distinguish up from down.
- (5) Alcohol creates a physical sensation of warmth, which may prevent a person in cold water from getting out before hypothermia sets in.

b. Because of the above physical effects, a boat operator with a blood alcohol concentration of higher than 0.10 percent is estimated to be more than 10 times as likely to die in a boating accident than an operator who has not consumed alcohol. Passengers are also at a much greater risk of injury and death, especially if they also are drinking alcoholic beverages.

**2. Boating.** Many Soldiers and family members will be boating this summer. The rules governing the use of boats vary, depending on the country in which the boat is used. In some areas, no experience is required to pilot a boat, while other areas require testing and training at some level. Regardless of where you use a boat, hazards are present that need to be understood and avoided to reduce the risk of death or injury.

a. According to the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG)—

- (1) 76 million Americans participate in recreational boating each year. On average, more than 800 Americans die each year from boating accidents. Seventy percent of those fatalities occur between May and September, with July as the deadliest month.
- (2) Seventy-seven percent of all fatalities on the water involve people not wearing personal floatation devices (PFDs).
- (3) Young males are at greatest risk: those from age 20 to 39 account for the vast majority of boating accidents each year.

- (4) Commanders should emphasize the following keys to safe boating:
- (5) Every boater should wear a PFD.
- (6) Alcohol and boating are a dangerous combination, and alcohol should not be part of the outing. More than half of all boating accidents are alcohol-related.
- (7) All boaters should take a course in boating safety.

**3. Water-Skiing.** Do not take unnecessary risks while water-skiing. The following tips will help you safely enjoy this sport:

- a. Always have an observer in the boat. (This is a legal requirement in many States.) The boat driver cannot watch the skier and operate the boat safely at the same time.
- b. Always wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved PFD designed for water-skiing or one that meets “CE” (*Conformité Européenne*) standards. Ski belts are not recommended. Your approved PFD will help keep you afloat.
- c. Never ski in rough water. High waves or a choppy sea will prevent the towboat from maintaining a steady course and speed.
- d. Stay well clear of congested areas and obstructions. Water-skiing requires a lot of open area.
- e. Do not spray or “buzz” swimmers, boats, or other skiers. Such stunts are dangerous, discourteous, and could cause an unintentional collision.
- f. Never ski after dark. It is hazardous and illegal. Any boat traveling fast enough to tow a skier is traveling too fast to navigate safely at night.
- g. Never water-ski while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Such activity is extremely dangerous because of the impairment to your judgment and ability to respond. A recent study conducted with expert skiers who were deliberately intoxicated indicated that even their ability to ski was dramatically reduced.
- h. Use hand signals between the skier and the observer. Agree before you start what each signal means so there is no confusion at a critical moment.
- i. Keep away from crowded beaches, docks, swimming areas, rocks, and bridge pilings.

**4. Swimming.** Every year in the European military community, someone dies or is severely injured as a result of a swimming accident. These accidents were preventable. Inexperience, lack of supervision, unfamiliar water, horseplay, and alcohol use are the most common factors in these accidents. Swimming in rivers can be extremely dangerous because of swift currents and

boating traffic. The water also can be cold, which increases the chance of hypothermia. Public swimming pools are generally considered safer than open-water swimming areas, but this is not always the case. Authorized swimming areas (USAREUR Reg 385-2) have lifeguards on duty and meet health standards. Every base support battalion (BSB) is required to maintain a policy on approved swimming areas, and can provide guidance to the community. Consult your local BSB safety office for the most current information.

**NOTE:** European lifeguards are different from those you may have encountered in the United States; they wander through the facility and may perform other duties. Adult supervision of small children is critical.

**(1) Drowning.** Most drowning occurs within 10 yards of shore. Learning to swim and understanding water hazards can increase your chances of survival. Here are some tips:

- Never swim alone. Swim with a friend at all times.
- Swim in a safe place, preferably one with lifeguards. Check with your BSB safety office for approved swimming areas.
- Do not swim when overheated, tired, or chilled, or during a storm.
- Do not dive into unfamiliar waters or try to swim in unfamiliar river currents.
- Always empty “kiddie” pools when not in use. Maintain close supervision when in use.
- Learn basic water-rescue and water-survival techniques to help drowning victims and to protect yourself.
- Learn cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) to help drowning victims.
- Remember that alcohol does not mix with swimming.
- Most importantly, know your swimming ability. PFDs should be worn by inexperienced swimmers in unfamiliar or deep water.

**(2) Rescue Techniques.** The Red Cross creed for lifesaving involves four steps in the following order: reach, throw, row, and go. (Do not try the next step until you are sure that the previous step will not work.)

- **Reach.** First try to reach the person. Use your hand or anything else that can be held onto, such as a belt, a fishing pole, a jacket, an oar, or a rope.
- **Throw.** If you cannot reach the person, throw something to him or her that will float, such as a ball, a beach toy, a picnic cooler, a piece of wood, a plastic bottle, or a spare tire.

- **Row.** If the person is too far away, go to him or her by using an air mattress, a log, a raft, a small boat, a surfboard, or anything else that you can row or paddle with your hands.
- **Go.** If you are unable to reach the person using the above three steps, swim out and tow him or her to shore, but only if you are a good swimmer and trained in lifesaving techniques.