

Safety Note #81

FIELDWORK SAFETY: WATER



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Administrative Office

Performing work from watercraft or while partially immersed or adjacent to water poses several risks to fieldworkers. Primary risks to fieldworkers include watercraft accidents, cold stress, and drowning. Information available from the Department of Boating and Waterways (DBW) indicates between 1995 and 2004 an average of 867 accidents, 489 injuries, and 51 fatalities occurred annually on California waterways. Data from the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control indicate the fifth leading cause of unintentional death in California between 1996 and 1998 was drowning with 1,542 total fatalities.

The following fieldwork precautions should be followed to reduce the potential for incurring injuries while working on, in, or adjacent to water:

- When performing fieldwork near or on water, it is a prudent practice to be capable of swimming.
- Be aware of the water conditions in the fieldwork area. Know where currents, rapids, and obstructions exist and the locations of shallow and deep spots.
- Be prepared for field conditions by learning the daily weather and if appropriate, tidal forecast(s).
- When working from watercraft or close to water, always wear an approved personal flotation device (i.e., life vest or preserver).
- When using a motorized watercraft, review the operator's manual with particular attention given to descriptions of safety procedures.
- Know and understand basic navigational rules (ie: "Rules of the Road"), as presented in the DBW publication *ABCs of the California Boating Law* (<http://dbw.ca.gov/Pubs/Abc/>).
- Before using, always inspect the watercraft for damage or disrepair and make sure all motor shields and guards are securely in place.
- Never overload a watercraft.
- Wear a wet suit or waders when entering cold water.
- Depart any water body when you become aware of an approaching storm.
- Maintain a safe distance from water intake or outlet structures and spillways.
- Always follow all laws and regulations for waterways.

For additional information about watercraft safety, see *California Boating Law at the DBW internet site*: <http://www.dbw.ca.gov/LawsRegs/>.