

**Safety Tips for Swift or Flood Waters**

One of the biggest potential threats to both victims and rescuers in these conditions is hypothermia. Hypothermia is defined as a body core temperature less than 35 degrees Celsius. Decreased consciousness occurs when the core temperature falls to approximately 32 to 30 degrees. Heart failure is the usual cause of death when the core temperature cools to below 30 degrees. The body loses heat to the water about 30 times faster than in air.

When around the water, if you are 15 feet or closer you should have a life jacket on at all times in case the bank would give way or you accidentally fall in. Swift water is very deceptive. The mesmerizing fascination of swiftly flowing water is also an extreme hazard, especially to young children and pets, who may draw too close to the edge of a flood-swollen river, stream, or canal and fall in. Would-be rescuers are also at risk. Nearly half of all drowning in swift water are would-be rescuers, including good Samaritans and emergency personnel who lack proper swift water rescue training and equipment but feel the need to “do something” to help.

The first thing to remember if you fall into swiftly moving water is to keep your feet as close to the surface as possible and pointed down stream. Remember that, unless it is needed, swimming increases heat loss by up to 50%. Consider your best options before swimming to a certain location to increase your survival. When your feet dangle below the surface, especially in flood conditions, your feet are more likely to get caught on a tree, car, or other debris that may be there because of the high water. When this happens the moving water will push your body and head forward. One of the most dangerous things in flood waters is called a “strainer.” This deadly hydraulic feature is caused by a tree in the water. Water flows under the strainer, trapping debris (and persons). Not only can you get caught in this, but it can keep you under water. Depending how strong the hydraulic pull of the water undertow is, you could be pinned by that alone even when wearing a life jacket.

If you do not have a life jacket it would be recommended that you wear a Type V when around swift flood waters. This type of life jacket provides the same performance as most other life jackets. They are also designed to turn most unconscious users to a face-up position. To put this into perspective, an average adult wearing a bathing suit in water weighs between 10 and 15 lbs. A type V life jacket has between 15.5 to 22 lbs buoyancy, more than enough to keep a person afloat until help arrives. Also, the most important part of wearing a life jacket is to make sure it is the right size to fit you. If a life jacket is too loose, it will come right off your body in swift water.

In short, the safest thing to do during a flood is to evacuate properly and stay away from the water. Do not drive around road blocks and/or through water that is more than ½ the depth of your tires.

*Hypothermia in Water*

