Safety Tips for Those Working Around Water



Safety Talk

What's at Stake

People who aren't expecting to end up in water often are not prepared for that possibility and the results can be tragic. Every year in the United States and Canada, an estimated 3,800 people drown, with many of these victims being people who ended up in the water unintentionally.

What's the Danger

Imagine you took an unexpected tumble into water, fully clothed and maybe dragged down by a tool belt or other gear. What if you were alone and there was no one nearby to help? What if you were a weak swimmer or a non-swimmer?

Example

An 18-year-old worker was using a tractor to grade soil on a grassy bank, when the machine and its young operator slid into the water. The worker, a non-swimmer, surfaced once and then slipped below the surface and drowned. A police officer operating a Zodiac boat fell out of it while making a turn. The officer was wearing a bulletproof vest, his duty belt and boots. Unfortunately, he was not wearing a lifejacket. Witnesses saw him surface once before he drowned.

How to Protect Yourself

When you're required to work close to, on or above water, be sure that these safety measures are in place in case you or a coworker falls into water:

- Water-edge ladders– ladders that lead out of the water–are located at intervals along the edge of the water.
- Lifejackets or personal flotation devices (PFDs) are available to workers who could potentially fall into the water.
- There's a buddy system in place so that a co-worker will use a reaching pole, rope or life ring to help save someone who enters the water unexpectedly.
- A reaching pole, rope and/or life ring is available, and you know where to find the equipment.
- A rescue boat is available.
- There are strong swimmers in the work crew who are capable of rescuing people who fall into the water.

- Someone on the crew is trained in first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).
- If you’re working alone, you’re required to notify others of your whereabouts and check in periodically.
- You have a whistle to blow in an emergency.
- If working above water, you’re using fall protection gear.
- You’re wearing appropriate slip-resistant footwear.
- You have blankets or a heat source nearby, such as a vehicle with a heater, to warm a person who has fallen into cold water and may be suffering from hypothermia.

Final Word

The shock of unexpectedly falling into water, particularly freezing cold or fast-moving water, can quickly cause panic to set in. If your work takes you near water, ensure you are wearing the right gear, including a PFD, to keep you afloat and alive until help arrives.