

Spring and summer activities often find visitors and children near rivers and streams, enjoying nature's serene sounds or cooling sore feet from a long day's hike. Water-related accidents are among the most common cause of death in our lakes, rivers, and streams. Many drowning victims were not trying to swim but were simply engaging in activities as innocent as wading, taking photos or playing along the stream bank.

It's important to understand **water safety** in and around these tempting waters. What can seem peaceful, warm and shallow can prove to be deceptively cold and easily overwhelm the strongest individuals. Each year, unexpected victims, whether purposefully in the water (boating, swimming, wading or crossing streams) or accidentally in the water (scrambling on rocks or even falling while hiking), find themselves in a water rescue situation.

Be Aware

Be cautious anytime you or your family are near rivers and streams. Consider these precautions as spring snow melts and rivers and streams rise. Also be cautious when waters appear warm or slow moving, but actually have strong and sometimes dangerous currents below the surface.

- **Water Temperature:** Air temperatures may feel hot and the water may feel or appear warm, but temperatures can be extremely cold below the surface. Hypothermia can quickly set in and overwhelm even the strongest of swimmers, becoming too weak to escape.
- **Currents:** In as little as six inches, water that may look calm on the surface and slow-moving can have enough force to knock you off your feet and sweep you downstream. Even a slow current can take you where you don't want to go, towards hazards, and leave strong swimmers unable to reach the shore.
- **Water Hazards:** A slippery and uneven river bottom combined with the stream's current can suddenly sweep you off your feet. Debris and underwater features such as trees, branches and logs, and even narrow gaps between rocks can trap you under water.

Water Safety is Your Responsibility

Anytime you're playing in and around water -- especially with children, be aware of your surroundings. Slippery rocks, an unstable shoreline or even a distraction that takes your focus away from the water, can cause an accident -- quickly and quietly.

- Check river and stream conditions before heading out on your hike and always let someone know where you are going and when you will return. River and stream condition information may be found at visitor centers, ranger stations and from weather alerts.
- Inquire about swimming regulations. At some sites swimming is not recommended or may even be prohibited. Follow "No Swimming" signs.

- Where allowed, choose swimming areas carefully. Often hazards are not visible in what may seem like a good place to swim or wade.
- Wear a properly fitting life jacket for all river activities. Don't assume you have the swimming skills to keep you afloat, even the strongest swimmers can drown.
- When near rapids or other moving water, always stay on the established trails or developed areas.
- Keep a close watch on children even if they are far from the water. Water safety for children is especially important as they can quickly enter the water and get in trouble when your attention is diverted for only a moment.
- Never walk, play or climb on slippery rocks and logs near rivers and streams.
- Never swim or wade upstream from a waterfall, even if the water appears shallow or calm.
- Be cautious of sudden drop offs.