

Safe Operating Procedures for Wading Activities

Purpose

To define the safe operating procedures in a manner that informs and instructs employees of CUSTOMER of the key health and safety points and controls to remember when performing wading activities.

Background

Wading in stationary or flowing water is hazardous, particularly when either the depth and/or flows are excessive. It is well known that if you fall in the water, the likelihood of drowning is higher if you are wearing waders, as the water will quickly flood into the waders, dragging you down. Hypothermia is also a common hazard, particularly after an accidental fall in the water.

Personal Protective Equipment

- Personal flotation device (PFD) approved by the Coast Guard
- Before starting shift, apply sunscreen and insect repellent. Reapply as needed.
- Sun hat or cap
- Non-slip water shoes
- Chest waders

Safe Operating Procedure

Things to Consider

Water depths are often deceptive and the force of flowing water must not be underestimated. Before entering the water a person intending to wade must assess the safety of wading at a particular site. These factors can include but are not restricted to:

- stream depth
- stream velocity
- rate of change of level
- a person's height, weight, confidence and ability
- prior knowledge of the stream
- stream bed characteristics
- proximity to emergency care in the event of an incident

Before leaving, careful preparation is necessary to ensure your ability to cope with changes or emergencies is greatly improved.

- Do not go wading alone – you must always have at least another St. Lawrence River Institute of Environmental Sciences employee with you. This person shall not be wading.

- Check the forecast for any potential inclement weather
- Ensure your Program Leader or site contact is aware of the planned schedule, and when you expect to return.
- Always plan your route of entry.

Proper Equipment

- The waist of the waders should be “sealed” around the wearer’s body, usually with a belt – this will help restrict the loss of air and ingress of water in the event of an incident
- In cold and wet conditions the use of wet weather jackets may be necessary.
- Wear warm protective clothing, making sure your head and neck are covered.
- Do not wear your chest waders while in a moving boat.
- Do not lose eye contact with the spotter.

If You Fall In

- **Immediately** tuck up. In a tuck position less water will leak in and the air in your waders will be trapped buoying you up and also keeping you drier.
- **Roll** onto your back keeping your knees tucked. You will need to put your arms in the water to balance yourself. If close to shore you can use a backsculling action to get back.
- **Don’t panic.** You must not try to swim, tread water or float in an upright position.
- If swept into fast flowing water, face downstream and go with the current feet first. Use your feet and hands to push away from rocks. Try to stay on your back and in the tucked position.

Additional Resources

SOP – Boating Activities

Document Management

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