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May 3, 2017

Historic Snowpack Means Higher and Colder Water Flows, Warns PG&E and Division of Boating and Waterways

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California State Parks Division of Boating and Waterways (DBW) and Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) warn water enthusiasts of colder and higher river stream flows this spring and summer. Higher flows from record rainfall in many parts of the state and continuing snowmelt this spring, are expected to last longer and be higher than in several years. Swift water can create treacherous conditions for all recreationists – waders, swimmers, paddlers, boaters, anglers and hikers cooling off at the water’s edge. Enthusiasts are encouraged to take extra precautions when in or near the water.

In California’s high water years, recreational boating fatalities related to swift water conditions more than doubled on state waterways when compared to similar conditions during low water years. According to DBW annual boating accident statistics, 48 California residents lost their lives in swift water conditions during the state’s high water years of 1993, 1998, 2005, 2010 and 2011 combined. During the state’s drought or low water period of 2012-2016, accident statistics confirm that 23 fatalities occurred in swift water conditions.

“The month of May traditionally marks the beginning of California’s recreational boating season,” said DBW’s Deputy Director Lynn Sadler. “To increase the chances of survival in cold, high water, it is critical that water enthusiasts exercise extra caution and awareness. We urge boaters and water enthusiasts to study the outdoor conditions and stay safe.”

“With the most snowmelt in decades, we ask those enjoying the outdoors to be careful near mountain streams, rivers and reservoirs. Water flows can fluctuate as snow melts faster on warmer days, so always be prepared for a change in conditions,” said Ed Halpin, PG&E’s senior vice president of generation and chief nuclear officer.

Below are some water safety tips:

Know the Water

- Sudden immersion in [cold water](#) can stimulate the “gasp reflex,” causing an involuntary inhalation of air or water. It can even trigger cardiac arrest, temporary paralysis, hypothermia and drowning. When faced with swift water, even the strongest swimmers may be easily overwhelmed.
- Cold water entering the ear canal can cause vertigo and disorientation. This may confuse swimmers, causing them to venture deeper into the water.
- Cold water also reduces body heat 25 to 30 times faster than air does at the same temperature, and causes impairment that can lead to fatalities.

- Recreating in PG&E canals and flumes is strictly prohibited. Stay out of these water conveyances, which are very dangerous due to slippery sides and fast moving water.

Know your Limits

- Swimming in open water is more difficult than in a swimming pool – people tire more quickly and can get into trouble.
- Many unseen obstacles can be lurking below the water’s surface - this is especially the case with this year’s high runoff following years of drought. Drought-stricken forests and storm-driven landslides have filled rivers with submerged trees and rocks. Swift water can make these obstacles even more treacherous. Guided trips for inexperienced paddlers are recommended.

Wear a Life Jacket

- Conditions change quickly in open water and even the best swimmers can misjudge the water and their skills when boating or swimming. Wearing a [properly fitted U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket](#) can increase survival time.
- A life jacket can also provide some thermal protection against the onset of cold water shock and keep you afloat until someone else can rescue you.
- Need a life jacket? Many locations across the state allow you to borrow a lifejacket for the day or weekend. Learn more at www.BoatCalifornia.com.

Whitewater Rafting and Paddling

- Most California rivers are fed by the mountain snowpack, so they are cold year around. Even on warm, sunny days, rafters and paddlers must be prepared to deal with the water temperatures. The dangers increase as water temperatures decrease below normal body temperature (98.6 degrees F).
- DBW offers whitewater enthusiasts [informative safety videos](#) online. The dangers of high, fast and cold water safety.

Parental Supervision

- Actively supervise children in and around open bodies of water, giving them your undivided attention. Do not assume that someone is watching them. Appoint a designated “water watcher,” taking turns with other adults.
- Teach children that swimming in open water is not the same as swimming in a pool: they need to be aware of uneven surfaces, river currents, ocean undertow and changing weather.

For more water safety information, including boating laws, please visit www.BoatCalifornia.com.

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About DBW

[DBW](#) enhances public access to California’s waterways and promotes on-the-water safety to California’s more than four million motorized and non-motorized boaters through programs funded by vessel registration fees, boating fuel tax dollars and boating facility construction loan payments. For more information, visit www.dbw.parks.ca.gov.



About PG&E

PG&E owns and operates 97 reservoirs, many of which are open to boating and fishing and offer facilities such as campgrounds, picnic areas, boat launches and kayak put in and take out points. Please visit www.pge.com/recreation for information or to make online camping

reservations. For information about PG&E's power generation public safety program, please call (415) 973-SAFE.

Pacific Gas and Electric Company, a subsidiary of [PG&E Corporation](#) (NYSE:PCG), is one of the largest combined natural gas and electric energy companies in the United States. Based in San Francisco, with more than 20,000 employees, the company delivers some of the nation's cleanest energy to nearly 16 million people in Northern and Central California. For more information, visit www.pge.com/ and www.pge.com/en/about/newsroom/index.page.



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