



Together, Building
a Better California



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PG&E and Division of Boating and Waterways Warn of Cold Water Hazards during Spring Snowmelt

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California’s Division of Boating and Waterways (DBW) and Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) encourage water enthusiasts to take extra precautions this spring when in or near rivers. These relatively full waterways will continue to rise as snow melts and will be dangerously cold. Simple actions such as knowing the water (is it too cold or swift), knowing your limits, wearing a life jacket or simply not entering the water when conditions are deemed unsafe can save a life.

Last spring, California’s rivers were also full and running high, fast and cold. Despite warnings from multiple public entities, numerous people entered rivers and drowned. The rising waters cover obstacles below the surface. Debris, trees and rocks combined with cold, swift water creates treacherous conditions for all recreationists – waders, swimmers, paddlers, boaters, anglers and hikers cooling off at the water’s edge. Another important fact is the temperature of rivers during spring. The average swimming pool temperature runs about 80 degrees. In contrast, swift water from snowmelt can be as cold as 40 degrees and trigger shock, paralysis and drowning.

“Do not enter the water if it’s too cold,” said DBW’s Acting Deputy Director Ramona Fernandez. “Even the strongest swimmers can be stunned by cold water and become incapacitated. Also, you’re not only putting yourself at risk, but also your family or friends. Too many times family members or friends go into the water to rescue their loved ones and end up losing their lives.”

Cold water immersion/shock happens quickly once you jump or fall into the water. You have one minute to adjust to the cold shock response and get control of your breathing. Swimming failure occurs after the first 10 minutes when cold water affects your ability to swim or tread water to stay afloat. Not wearing a life jacket or being alcohol-impaired while recreating in cold water makes it even more perilous and deadly once you can no longer move and slip into unconsciousness. Watch this [video](#) to see how quickly the effects of cold water immersion affects your body.

“Nothing is more important to PG&E than the safety of the public and our employees. With the snowmelt well underway, we ask those enjoying the outdoors to be careful near mountain streams, rivers and reservoirs. Water flows can increase or decrease rapidly, so always be alert and prepared for a change in conditions. Please put safety first during your recreation activities,” said Jon Franke, PG&E’s vice president of power generation.

Below are some water safety tips:

Stay Out and Stay Alive - Stay Out of Canals and Flumes

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

Know the Risks

- Prevention is the best way to save a person from drowning. By the time a person is struggling in water, a rescue is extremely unlikely and places the rescuer at risk.
- 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.

Learn About Self-Rescue Techniques

- If you do fall into the water, here are some survival tips:
 - Do control breathing, don't gasp. A sudden unexpected fall into cold water causes an involuntary gasp (or torso) reflex. It takes less than ½ cup of water in a person's lungs to drown. When someone remains calm, they have a greater chance of self-rescue.
 - Don't panic if you fall into the water.
 - Stay with your boat. It will help you stay afloat and will be seen more easily by rescuers. If it's capsized, try to climb on top.
 - Stay afloat with the help of a life jacket, regain control of breathing, and keep head above water in view of rescuers.
 - If possible, remove heavy shoes. Look for ways to increase buoyancy such as seat cushions or an ice chest.
 - If you're in the water with others, huddle together facing towards each other to help everyone stay afloat and keep warm.
 - If you do fall into a river without a life jacket on, watch this [video](#) to help you survive.

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 during spring and early summer snowmelt. Rising 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.
- Anyone within 20 ft. of water should be wearing a life jacket in case of an unexpected fall.
- 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? Check online to find [a life jacket loaner station](#) for a day or weekend use.

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 about 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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