

# Play it Safe in our Rivers and Lakes

Each year as we enjoy the warm days of spring and summer, many of us plan to escape the heat by participating in water related activities in our rivers and lakes. Although these activities can be very fun, they can also be extremely dangerous. It is important that all water related activities are supervised by an adult and that simple precautions are taken to avoid a tragedy. Having a good plan and following proven water safety guidelines can, and in most cases will, ensure that you have a safe and fun day in the water.



**Know the Water** – Washington's lakes and rivers are cold enough to cause hypothermia, even in the summer. This cold water can impact even the strongest swimmers. Water in the Green and White Rivers can drop to temperatures below 50 degrees. ***Cold water takes the heat out of the body 32 times faster than cold air, and even quicker if you are exerting yourself through physical exercise, such as swimming.*** As your body temperature decreases so does your ability to make decisions. When you're cold, you don't think as quickly, your muscles won't work as well and you can start to panic. Statistics have shown that in over 50% of drowning incidents, cold water is a factor.

In addition to the cold, the current in our rivers can quickly overpower a swimmer. ***Fast moving water, such as we have in the Green and White Rivers, can press a swimmer or boat against a log, rock or other obstacle with such force that it may trap or pin them there.*** Large rocks and logs can also quickly tip over rafts, canoes and kayaks. Other hazards, such as new channels or freshly fallen trees can present hazards at any time. These same conditions can make rescue efforts equally hazardous.

**Know Your Limits** – Watch out for the dangerous “too’s” – too tired, too cold, too far from safety, too much sun, too much strenuous activity. The VRFA recommends **wearing a life jacket** while swimming or boating. Set water safety rules for the whole family based on their swimming ability. Swimmers should stay hydrated to avoid muscle cramps and refrain from consuming alcohol.

The Valley Regional Fire Authority is part of a regional, multi-jurisdiction water rescue response team that provides SCUBA rescue personnel who are also cross-trained as swift-water rescue technicians. This dual role allows us to respond to all types of water rescue incidents and perform rescues in both still and swift water environments. With our specially equipped boats, water, and rope rescue equipment, our certified rescue technicians are ready to respond at all times.



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*“The VRFA creates a safer community through effective prevention, preparedness and aggressive emergency response.”*