Boating Safety

Each year more hunters die from drowning and the effects of hypothermia than from gunshot wounds. Waterborne hunting fatalities are often caused by deceptively simple actions that don’t seem hazardous, such as leaning out of the boat to retrieve a decoy or standing to get a better look at passing waterfowl. Many hunters do not consider themselves as “boaters” and are unfamiliar with the special conditions and challenges of the marine environment.

By following a few simple safety rules, you can keep yourself and your hunting partners out of danger. Know your boat, its equipment, the weather conditions and your limitations before getting on the water.
**Know Your boat**

Be familiar with your boat. Some designs are not as stable as others and are more likely to swamp or capsize. Avoid these situations by knowing the capacity of your boat; do not overload it with passengers or equipment.

Hunters and dogs should remain seated. If you must move, stay in the center of the boat and maintain a low center of gravity. Never move about with a loaded firearm. If you should capsize, stay with your boat. If possible, climb on top to get out of the water.

**Your equipment**

Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) are essential to safe waterborne hunting. You are required to carry a PFD for each person on board, and it is strongly suggested that everyone wear one. Special vests for hunting and fishing are available.

Other safety items you may wish to have onboard include day and night visual distress signals, an anchor with enough line to keep your boat from drifting, oars or paddles as an alternate form of propulsion, water bailer, first aid kit, maps of the area, emergency tools and spare parts.

**Weather conditions**

Weather and water conditions are important elements to consider as you plan your outing. Most water-related hunting fatalities occur on smaller bodies of water late in the year, when water and air temperatures are low and there is a greater frequency of storms. Check the weather forecast before you embark and stay on shore if storms are predicted. Avoid crossing large bodies of water during rough water.

If you should get caught in a squall, head for shore diagonally to the waves. Move passengers and equipment into the center of the boat to improve stability.

Hypothermia is most often caused by exposure to cold water, but prolonged exposure to cold air can cause it as well. Carry extra clothes in a waterproof bag and keep a survival kit with you, including matches in a waterproof container.

**Your personal limitations**

As a boat owner, it is your responsibility to maintain physical preparedness while on the water since the lives of others may be affected by your actions. Hunting can be a physically demanding sport. Don’t overextend your endurance by staying out on the water too long. Stay alert for signs of hypothermia such as shivering, drowsiness, numbness or weakness.

Never consume drugs or alcohol that will impair your judgement. Fifty percent of all reported boating fatalities are alcohol-related.

Hunters deliberately seek less-populated areas. It’s wise to let a responsible party know the general area where you plan to hunt and the time you expect to return. Make sure your hunting trip is enjoyable and safe by planning ahead and being diligent on the water.

“You are required to carry a life jacket for each person on board, and it is strongly suggested that everyone wear one.”