



# RHUMB LINES

*Straight Lines to Navigate By*



June 19, 2009

## Water Safety

*"Learning to swim not only improves your physical fitness, but it improves your chances of saving yourself, a shipmate, or a family member if things go wrong in the water, which they sometimes do.*

**– HMC(DSW/EXW/FMF) Ron Nading, Naval Safety Center Diving and Salvage Independent Duty Corpsman**

Last year, nine Sailors drowned – seven of these deaths were off-duty. While on duty, the utmost diligence is taken to stress operational risk management and safety. While recreation near, on and in the water can be a great pastime, risk management and safety must be considered in order to prevent injuries and loss of life. Just like risks are mitigated on duty, steps must be taken to ensure safety off-duty.

### Personal responsibility for safety in the water

- Learning to swim is the single best thing anyone can do to stay safe in and around the water. A majority of drowning deaths happen to people who had no intention of getting wet.
- Swim in areas supervised by a lifeguard and read and obey all rules and posted signs.
- Children or inexperienced swimmers should take precautions such as wearing a Coast Guard approved personal flotation device. Never rely on toys such as inner tubes or water wings to stay afloat.

### Pay close attention to children

- Each year, about 200 [children](#) drown and thousands of others are treated for submersion accidents which leave children with permanent brain damage and respiratory health problems.
- Children have a natural curiosity and attraction to water. In only a few seconds a child can wander away.
- It's never too early to learn to swim. Even infants can be taught to float.

### Preparing for a day on the boat

- Anyone planning to boat, jet ski, or participate in similar activities should know how to swim first.
- Carry Coast Guard approved [life jackets](#) for yourself and all passengers. Young children should wear theirs.
- Take a Coast Guard [boating course](#), which will teach you about navigation rules, emergency procedures, and the effects of wind, water conditions, and weather.
- Know local weather conditions and head for land as soon as you see or hear a storm.

### Alcohol increases your risk

- Alcohol impairs your judgment, vision, depth perception and coordination, all of which are crucial around the water.
- Inebriation makes it harder to stay warm in the water, increasing the risk of hypothermia.
- [Boating while drunk](#) is just as dangerous as driving while drunk. Half of boating accidents are alcohol-related, and a third of boating fatalities involve alcohol.

## Key Messages

- Learn to swim. Everyone is capable and should at least know how to float.
- The four major causes of drowning deaths are lack of life vests, alcohol abuse, lack of sufficient swimming skills and hypothermia.
- Recreation on, in and near the water can be enjoyed safely as long as risks are considered and mitigated through appropriate safety measures.

## Facts & Figures

- According to the National Water Safety Program, drowning is the second leading cause of accidental deaths for people 15-44 years of age.
- Two-thirds of those who drown never had any intention of being in the water.
- Most people drown within 10-15 feet of safety.  
For more information about water safety visit [www.safetycenter.navy.mil/ashore/recreation](http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/ashore/recreation)