Most boating fatalities in Alaska result from drowning in cold water while not wearing a life jacket.

Cold water immersion can kill in several ways, and most die long before they become hypothermic.

1. **COLD SHOCK RESPONSE**
   Within the first 2-3 minutes:
   - Gasping, hyperventilation and panic.
   - Inhaling water and drowning if not wearing a life jacket.
2. **SWIM FAILURE**
   Within the first 30 minutes:
   - Rapid cooling of arms and legs impairs the ability to keep the head above water.
   - Effects occur regardless of swimming ability.
   - Drowning if not wearing a life jacket.
3. **IMMERSION HYPOTHERMIA**
   After at least 30 minutes of immersion:
   - Gradual cooling of the body's core temperature eventually results in loss of useful conciousness.
   - Drowning if not wearing a life jacket.

Wearing your life jacket could be the single most important factor in surviving cold water immersion.

In cold water without a life jacket, it is very difficult to control breathing AND maintain a swim stroke.

Very quickly, impaired function can result in panic and even greater energy expenditure.

Life jacket designs have come a long way over the years and now come in a wide variety of styles and colors.

Although no *one* life jacket is perfectly suited for all persons in all situations, they all provide life saving flotation in the water.

In Alaska, capsizing and falls overboard are the leading causes of cold water immersion.

Capsizes are most often caused by:
- Overloading.
- Poorly secured or shifting loads.
- Improper boat handling in rough water.
- Loss of power or steerage.
- Anchoring from the stern.
- Wrapping a line around a drive unit.
- Taking a wave over the transom after a sudden stop.

Falls overboard are usually due to slipping or loss of balance when standing or moving around the boat or reaching for objects in the water. Most of these events happen quickly, often when you least expect it.

Another common cause of cold water drowning in Alaska is leaving a place of safety to swim for a boat. Watching a loose boat drift away from shore produces an almost irresistible impulse to swim for it. Ignore this impulse and seek help from fellow boaters.

Luckily for this man, he was wearing his life jacket when he fell off his boat. Now he will use his reboarding ladder to climb back aboard.

For more information:

Alaska Office of Boating Safety
550 West 7th Avenue, Suite 1380
Anchorage, AK 99501
907-269-8706

www.alaskaboatingsafety.org

Take the pledge at www.pledgetolive.org.

Follow these tips to help keep yourself and your passengers safe while boating on Alaska's cold water:

BE SMART!
- File a float plan and leave it with a trusted friend or relative. Your float plan should include a description of your boat and equipment, names of passengers, planned destination and route, expected return and when and who to call if overdue.
- Make sure the boat is either equipped with a reboarding ladder, rope ladder, foot sling, swim platform or designed such that a person in the water can easily get back into the boat.
- Brief your passengers: they should know where all the safety & emergency equipment is (and how to use it), how to start, steer and stop the boat, how to use the radio and what channel is for emergencies, and what the float plan entails (in case of delays or problems).

BE PREPARED!
- Always wear a life jacket when in an open boat or on an open deck. Trying to put your life jacket on in the water is extremely difficult (if not impossible) and costs precious time and energy.
- There are several things that every boater should carry ON THEIR PERSON while out on the water.
  - a sound-producing device, such as a whistle
  - a signaling device: mirror, small aerial flares, personal locator beacon
  - a communication device: hand-held water proof marine VHF radio, cell phone in a waterproof bag
  - survival kit: knife, waterproof matches, emergency blanket, resealable plastic bag for water collection

COLD WATER *Kills!*

Wear your life jacket.