

Working around Water Hazards



A Fact Sheet prepared by the National Telecommunications Safety Panel

Introduction

In the course of the work activity with moving water, extra precaution and safeguards should be taken. The decision must be made if work operations should continue or if work should be abandoned until conditions improve or safety equipment is obtained.

Hazard Conditions

- Flooded or swollen drainage ditches, fields, creeks, streams, swamps, sloughs, and marshes
- Large floating debris such as logs, trees, etc.
- Severe weather such as heavy rain, strong winds, lightning, etc.
- Downed power lines. If this occurs, contact the local utility company immediately. Do not enter the water!
- Swift or unpredictable currents.
- Intersections with non-functioning stop lights should be considered four-way stops.



Testing for Non-Hazardous Water Conditions

- Waters such as narrow drainage ditches and creeks that are known to be two feet deep or less, have little or no current and are free of debris, may be considered non-hazardous.
- Prior to entering, a probing device to verify water depth while crossing should be done.
- Employees and equipment may be transported only after the non-hazardous water depth has been verified.

Hazardous Work Operation Guidelines

If any of the following water conditions exists, the work operations will be delayed and the supervisor should be contacted for an alternate plan of action:

- Current makes standing difficult

- A secure foothold cannot be established by the employee while they are in the water.
- Water is or becomes more than two feet deep or above the employee's knees.
- If the water depth cannot be determined.

Safety Precautions

The following safety precautions and guidelines should be followed before entering or working in moving water hazard areas:

1. Before entering or crossing water, if possible contact land owners or close neighbors to obtain information on hidden hazards, depth of water, etc.
2. A minimum of two employees will be present if the water must be entered to perform a work operation.
3. All employees at the job site are required to wear U.S. Coast Guard approved Type III industrial flotation vests.
4. A safety line of at least 100' in length will be fastened in a loop with a bowline knot around the trunk of the employee entering moving water. For some operations with still water, a ring buoy with at least 90 feet of line is required.
5. A second employee will ensure that the safety line is attached to a stationary object and does not become entangled; a second employee will stand ready to complete a rescue if the employee becomes endangered.
6. A probing device should be used to verify water depth as the employee moves through the water.
7. Hip boots (boots which do not extend above the crotch) may be used when working in water. Chest waders (boots which cover three-quarters of the body and terminate in the chest area) should not be used!
8. Equipment belts, tools, or materials will not be worn or fastened to an employee while they are moving through or across water.



Use of a Boat

Depending on the activity a boat should be used to complete the job or if the project should be abandoned until conditions improve. Reason, judgment, and safety precautions prevail in all situations.

- A boat is used to complete work operations in water levels exceeding two feet or above the employee's knees.
- U.S. Coast Guard and state laws will be observed while the boat is being operated.
- Boats used by company employees will be of sufficient size to accommodate personnel, tools, and material to complete the work function.
- The depth of the water must be tested before the employee climbs out of the boat at the job site. The employee will not enter water if the water depth is more than two feet or above the knees.

Flotation Vest

- All employees wear U.S. Coast Guard-approved flotation vests at all times while in the boat.
- The flotation vest should be similar to a Stearns Type III/Type V or equivalent industrial U.S. Coast Guard-approved.
- The flotation vest must be inspected before and after use for defects that could alter its strength or buoyancy. Defective units are not to be used.

Working on Elevated Heights over Water

A fall protection system to arrest a fall from an elevated level is required for heights over 6 feet. It consists of a Full Body Harness, connectors, related equipment and anchorage point.

When working on railroad rights-of-way bridges or conducting inspections, a special rail anchorage connector is required.



Additional Information

- **Occupational Safety and Health Administration**
OSHA 1926.106
http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=STANDARDS&p_id=10669
- **U.S. Coast Guard Boating Safety**
<http://www.uscgboating.org/>