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Coast Guard issues winter boating, paddling safety advisory **Holiday gift ideas for mariners**

Boston - While storm-wrought snow levels have blanketed the Northeast, many mariners still find winter waters inviting. The Coast Guard is issuing a boating and paddling safety advisory for all winter boaters, paddlers, duck hunters and fishermen on the Northeast's coastal waters and any ice-free inland waters.

Coast Guard and state boating officials encourage winter boaters and paddlers to maintain a "worst case scenario" mentality and be prepared for cold-water immersion. Inland and coastal open water temperatures are 40 degrees or less and a sudden plunge into cold water can be fatal.

"Worse, if you're not wearing both a life jacket and a wet or dry suit your chances for survival are limited," said Al Johnson, the recreational boating safety specialist for the Northeast's First Coast Guard District.

Sudden cold-water immersion generates an uncontrollable gasping reflex, which makes it difficult to take the next breath. "If you're not wearing a life jacket and a wet or dry suit, keeping your head above water while fighting desperately to breathe is next to impossible," said Johnson.

"At the minimum, a life jacket should be equipped with neoprene gloves, a wool hat, and a signaling kit that includes a mirror, flares, whistle, light and a hand-held VHF radio," says Johnson. "It might sound excessive, but if you give some serious thought to crisis management, this equipment can save your life."

Johnson recommends staying with the boat to improve visibility for emergency personnel. Cold water rapidly diminishes swimming ability, so staying with the boat also improves chances for survival.

With the holidays fast approaching, Johnson suggests to the friends and families of water-sport enthusiasts, a variety of excellent gifts that can save a loved one's life.

These gifts include:

- Coast Guard approved life jacket
- Signaling kit (mirror, flares, whistle, lights, and an air horn, preferably with a pump)
- Nautical charts
- VHF Radio
- Dry/Wet Suit
- Neoprene gloves
- Compass/GPS system
- Emergency Position Indicating Radiobeacon (EPIRB)
- Life raft
- First aid kit

Johnson also recommends to the recipients of a holiday canoe or kayak to heed the above advice and take a boating safety course before launching their Christmas craft.

U.S. Coast Guard: Saving Lives Since 1790