

STAYING SAFE IN THE OUTDOORS


Gators and lightning and snakes . . . oh my! No matter what the sport, safety must always come first. Statistically, many outdoor sports are far safer than crossing a city street or taking the wheel of a car. Although we live in fairly civilized times, there are nevertheless some elements of risk when venturing outside. Here are some things you can do to ensure that you are as healthy and fit for tomorrow's fishing trip as you are for today's.



BOATING SAFETY — A special set of rules apply when anglers leave dry land behind to face their quarry on its own turf (or non-turf!). Boating accident statistics are extremely helpful in pointing out specific areas of concern. 🚤 According to 2002 figures, the most frequent type of accident by far involved collision with another vessel or a fixed object. Slow down, watch where you're going, know the rules of navigation, and drive defensively. 🚤 Alcohol and boating don't mix! There is a strong link between drinking and boating fatalities. 🚤 Wear a PFD (personal flotation device, or life vest) at all times. Half of last year's boating fatalities were drownings, most avoidable if only the boat occupants had been wearing life vests. Recently approved inflatable PFDs available are now much lighter and cooler than even the slimmest of traditional designs. 🚤 This is a huge topic! Much more information on boating safely can be found at <http://floridaconservation.org/law/boatsafe/>.

LIGHTNING — Florida is the lightning capital of the U. S. More than twice as many lightning-related deaths and injuries are reported here than in any other state. And within Florida, the tri-county area holds three of the top four statistics for fatalities. ⚡ Exercise caution at all times, but particularly during the most dangerous months—June, July, and August. ⚡ Avoid open ground. ⚡ Seek shelter in a building or a car. ⚡ Don't stand under a tree. However, if you must take shelter outdoors, avoid isolated trees and avoid the tallest trees. ⚡ If you are on the water, get off (or out) immediately. ⚡ If your skin begins to tingle or your hair starts to stand on end, a lightning strike may be imminent! Quickly crouch and bend forward with your feet together and your hands on your knees. You want to make yourself as small and low a target as possible, while minimizing your contact with the ground. Don't lie flat! ⚡ Heart attack is usually the actual cause of death for lightning-related fatalities; if someone is struck, seek medical help immediately.

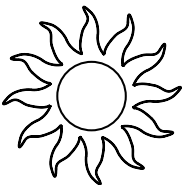


 **SKIN CANCER** — Skin cancer is something every outdoorsman, and especially those in subtropical Florida, should be concerned about. ☢️ Use sunblock! It should be rated SPF 30 or better, and protect against both UVA and UVB radiation. ☢️ For angling, always select a waterproof sunblock. ☢️ Remember to apply sunblock to often-overlooked spots such as your ears, nose, and neck (not always protected by a hat), as well as the back of your hands. ☢️ Don't let cloudy days fool you: up to 80% of invisible ultraviolet radiation gets through clouds, so you should still use sunblock. ☢️ Reapply two to three times during a full day, especially if you perspire a lot or enter the water. ☢️ Dress in light-colored clothing that will reflect sunlight. Although you should try to stay cool, you should also cover as much of your body as practical. For example, even on a hot day a lightweight long-sleeve shirt can still be comfortable if you will be out on the open water in a stiff breeze. ☢️ Wear a hat! Large brims and the presence of back flaps are pluses. Caution—mesh-backed caps will let UV radiation through, so avoid these if your “ground cover” runs sparse up yonder!

HYPOTHERMIA — Believe it or not, hypothermia can be a concern in the Sunshine State, particularly when heading out by boat. ❄️ Be aware of approaching weather patterns and dress appropriately, bringing warmer clothing if the possibilities warrant. ❄️ Stay dry—pack rain gear, and exercise special caution around water.

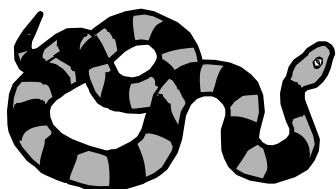
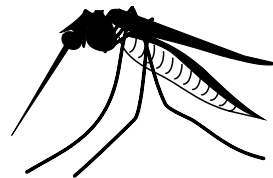


Getting wet significantly increases the rate of heat loss from the body. ❄️ Take shelter from wind, and know that the wind chill factor can increase the chances of hypothermia dramatically. This includes riding in a boat on a still day—cruising around at 35 mph will make 40° feel like 28°, well below freezing!



HEATSTROKE — At the other extreme, and much more often, high temperatures pose a threat to outdoorsmen. ☀️ Dress lightly, while at the same time considering your exposure to UV radiation (see above). Light-colored clothing will help reflect heat and sunlight. ☕️ Drink plenty of fluids, and drink them throughout the day—not just when you start feeling thirsty (by then you may already be dehydrated!). 🍷 Don't drink alcoholic beverages. ☀️ Avoid sunburn (above), as it can impair your skin's ability to shed heat and thus increase your chances of getting heatstroke as well.

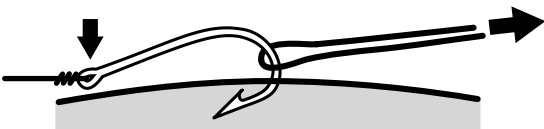
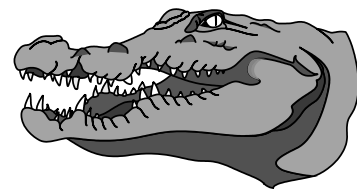
INSECTS — 🕷️ Watch out for spiders and wasps in any brushy areas as well as the underside of boats that are stored overturned. Cabbage palms are also favorite homes of such critters. 🕸️ Always watch where you place your hands! 🕸️ When bank fishing, keep your eyes open for fire ant nests on the ground and wasp nests in shoreline brush. 🦟 West Nile virus cases have increased sharply in the last couple years, and there have even been some malaria cases recently. Both diseases are mosquito-borne. 🦟 Wear long pants, socks, and long-sleeved shirts in the early morning or evening when mosquitoes are active. 🦟 Given a choice, avoid the morning and evening hours when mosquitoes are out—though for anglers, this may not be practical. 🦟 Use insect repellent, and choose one that contains DEET. Don't forget to apply to face, ears, neck, and hands.



SNAKES — For anglers, the primary venomous reptile that might be encountered is the cottonmouth (“water moccasin”). This species is found in marshes, swamps, and lakes. However, the vast majority of “moccasins” you see will actually be nonvenomous brown water snakes. And you are under no moral obligation to get close enough to a snake to determine whether it is actually venomous or not! Few have to

worry about snakes if they just exercise common sense and simply give them a wide berth and leave them alone. 🐍 First things first: if you are actually bitten by a snake, relax! Less than 1 out of 1,400 snake bites—only 0.07%—are fatal within the U. S. (be glad you don't reside in India or Africa). 🐍 Remain calm; wash the bite with soap and water; immobilize the bitten area and keep it below your heart; and then seek medical attention for any snakebite. Even if the snake is not venomous, infection can result. 🐍 **DO NOT** apply incisions, ice, electric shock, or tourniquets to the wound. Despite what that old “snake-bite kit” might say, such measures have not been proven to help and are quite likely to be harmful instead.

ALLIGATORS — As with snakes, simply leaving these animals alone and maintaining a respectful distance is the best solution. 🐊 Rule Number One: Never feed alligators! This causes alligators to lose their natural fear of man, teaches them to approach people, and is usually the first step toward a problem gator. This practice also happens to be illegal! 🐊 Be particularly cautious around gators larger than six feet; there is a direct correlation between an alligator's size and the possible threat it poses. 🐊 Don't discard fish scraps in the water near docks, cleaning tables, or boat landings. This will attract alligators. 🐊 Never swim or wade in areas containing large alligators; this goes double for the twilight and night hours. Even a fairly small pond can contain a very large alligator!



HOOK REMOVAL — Sooner or later, some anglers manage to catch something much larger than expected—themselves, or worse yet, their fishing partner! This simple trick makes hook removal quick and

(almost) painless. Simply loop a strong cord through the bend of the hook, press down on the eye of the hook, and then give a sharp pull straight back on the cord. Wash the wound with soap and water and apply an antiseptic ointment. Seek medical assistance if the wound is deep or shows signs of infection, and stay updated on tetanus shots.