

News From the CPA Coordinator - Bill Smith

The heat of summer is here. Everyone should be taking precautions to prevent hyperthermia and all heat-related illnesses. When paddling around Chesapeake Bay and other area waterways, not only is the air extremely hot but also the water is very warm so that it does not help much with cooling a person. A primary risk factor is working or living in air conditioning all week and then coming out on a weekend paddle; you should find ways to acclimate yourself to the heat. Other factors include age, health status, and medications that may lower your tolerance.

More than 600 persons die from hyperthermia or other heat-related illnesses annually. Hyperthermia is the condition when the victim is unable to control his rising body temperature. Heat stress can lead to heat stroke, which can be deadly. Heat stroke occurs when the body temperature reaches 104°.

The best way to combat hyperthermia is to become acclimated to the hot weather, dress to protect your body from sun exposure, wear sun-block, and drink lots of water and electrolytes (sodium, potassium). While on the water, you should keep your clothes and hat wet to help cool your body. Avoid drinks with caffeine or alcohol since they can exacerbate the condition.

Heat stress is the first stage and, if not treated, can lead to more serious conditions of heat exhaustion or even heat stroke. Symptoms for heat stress include dizziness, weakness, nausea, thirst and headache. Treatment for heat stress includes removing the victim from the heat or moving them to a cooler area, having them drink liquids and electrolytes, and cooling the victim with water or ice. Applying ice at the arm pits or groin is most effective.

When the body can no longer cool itself, heat exhaustion occurs just before heat stroke. Symptoms include sweating profusely, dizziness, weakness, thirst, coordination issues, cool and clammy skin and a rapid pulse. When the victim reaches this stage, it is time to call 911. Treatment is the same as described above.

In the three-step progression, heat stroke, when the body temperature reaches 104°, is the most serious. Fainting is an early sign of heat stroke; other symptoms include irritability, confusion, coordination problems, flushed skin, reduced or no sweating, and a weak or rapid pulse. The best treatment while waiting for an ambulance includes cooling the victim in the water or shower, urging the drinking of liquids, and applying ice bags.

Other heat-related conditions include:

Heat syncope or fainting occurs when the blood flow to the brain is reduced and the blood pressure drops

Heat cramps follow intense exertion in the heat

Heat edema occurs when standing or sitting in the heat, causing hands, feet or legs to swell

Heat rash is a pimple-like rash from prolonged exposure to the heat; treat by changing clothes and cooling the area

The very best treatment for hyperthermia is prevention. Make sure you take and drink plenty of water (cool water is best for absorption) and have an electrolyte available. Carry extra water; much better to have too much than run out before the take-out. On longer trips I always take a jug of frozen water that usually thaws by lunch break. While paddling,

watch fellow paddlers for signs of fatigue or other indications of hyperthermia and often remind one another to drink water. Make sure to wear a hat and clothing that covers your exposed skin, preferably something you can keep wet to draw heat from your body. You can also roll or take a bow dunk when on the water, a life saver on a hot day.

In my early days of paddling I was a poor example since I would frequently run out of water or forget it in my vehicle. I paid the price a few times. I learned a lot about hydration during the KIPP paddles so I always make sure I have my water. Now, forgetting my water would be as bad as forgetting my boat. Water should be a required safety item for every trip. ♦

~ Bill Smith

Lend Your Digital Skills to CPA!

Chesapeake Paddlers Association needs an additional member for the Website Team. This person would be responsible for posting information to the CPA websites (<http://www.cpakayaker.com> and <http://www.cpakayaker.com/forums>) and making any necessary changes to the web content, including updating the WordPress and phpBB® Forum Software installations. Works with other members of the Website Team, the Coordinator, Newsletter Editors, and Steering Committee members. If you have website experience, especially with WordPress and phpBB, please reply to steering_committee@cpakayaker.com. ♦

