

Safety in the River

General Safety:

During monitoring, keep your hands away from eye and mouth areas. Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after monitoring. Never eat after monitoring without first washing your hands.

If the water appears to be severely polluted (a strong smell of sewage or chemicals, unusual colors, lots of dead fish, oil sheen), you may decide not to monitor.

Insect and Tick Bites:

Before monitoring, ask if any of your monitoring team members are allergic to any type of insects, bees, or spiders. If so, make sure you know where they keep any antidotes or medicines that will subdue or stop an allergic reaction. If a volunteer gets an insect bite that swells up to unusual size or has severe redness, seek medical attention.

Ticks are prevalent in grassy and wooded areas. It is important that volunteers check their bodies (especially hair-covered sections) for ticks. If it is a tick, do not pull it out. Yanking the tick from the scalp may cause an infection if the tick's head or tube remains in the scalp. Grasp the tick with a pair of forceps or tweezers and gently twist the insect counter-clockwise for several rotations until the tick is free. Swab the area with hydrogen peroxide after removing the tick to clean the area.

Wader Safety:

Excerpt from "Gone Fishin'" by L. Gordon Stetser, Jr.
Michigan Out of Doors, June 1992

Fisheries biologists, who carry up to 70 pounds of gear when they wade, stress that a good technique will minimize your problems when wading. First, plan your route. Look ahead for exits, should you have difficulty, and "read" the water for spots to avoid, such as drop-offs, sunken logs, and tricky currents. Backtracking is often dangerous or impossible once you've committed to a tough situation.

Cross currents at right angles or slightly downstream. Move slowly, keeping the foot on the upstream side in the lead and pointed forward. Your rear, or anchor, foot should point downstream and be at right angles to your lead foot. Move the lead foot forward about half a step, feeling for a solid hold. Next, move the anchor foot forward the same distance – you should shuffle across so that your anchor foot never passes the lead. This way, both feet are always in position to lend support. If you must turn around, do so toward upstream.

If, despite your precautions, you take a spill, don't panic. Your waders, even full of water, weigh less than on land and the water inside the waders doesn't add a single ounce as long as you're in the water! Further, the common fear that air trapped in your waders will raise your feet higher than your head and force your face underwater is simply unfounded.

Waders do streamline your legs and make kicking useless, however. If the current is gentle, your best bet is to bend your knees and use the side or breast stroke to safety. In a swifter current, lie on your back, bend your knees, and point your feet downstream so your feet, not your head, will bounce off the rocks. Sculling with your hands will help direct you to the nearest shallow area, which, of course, you had noted before. *Don't* waste precious energy in the vertical position going for the bottom. Without the ability to read, this position is virtually impossible to maintain and leads quickly to exhaustion – the major cause of many drownings. And remember, concentrate on getting out of the water and *not* saving your gear!