



UNIFIED FIRE AUTHORITY

Swift Water Dangers Safety Message

By UFA PIO Ryan Love

UFA would like to remind residents of swift water dangers as the snow melts.

Several late storms have brought much precipitation to the Wasatch Front following a decade of less than impressive snowfall. Warm temperatures have begun to melt the mountain snow that will flow down the valley through a network of rivers. The recreation opportunities seem endless. Though the rivers may be tempting this summer, the high flows and cold temperatures make rivers deceptively dangerous. Big and Little Cottonwood Creeks have not had flows as high as currently forecasted since 2011.

Rivers with high flows and cold temperatures can claim the lives of even the most experienced and skilled swimmers. With the large snowpack, these fast-flowing, cold conditions are likely to continue long into the summer season. Hypothermia can occur quickly and severely incapacitate even the strongest swimmers. As the weather warms up and residents begin to flock to the water, Unified Fire Authority wants to remind Utahans' to take the right precautions before entering the water.

In Northern Utah, drowning deaths most often occur in warm months. What makes Utah unique is the frequency of drowning deaths in water bodies fed by snow melt, which includes most cold-running rivers found in the state. In May 2017, a mother and a Good Samaritan drowned while trying to rescue a 4-year-old girl in the Provo River.

All too often, we see would-be rescuers tragically become victims as well. If you witness someone being swept away by the current, do NOT jump into the water to try to save them. Look for something you can use to reach out to the victim and call 911 immediately.

When someone is swept away, it is instantly a critical situation. The water is often just a few degrees above freezing temperatures. Once you are in it, your body can shut down very quickly and your ability to use your motor functions is going to be limited. If you are swept away by swift water, try to focus on keeping your head above the water and your feet downstream facing the direction you are going. This will eliminate the chances of crashing into boulders and getting caught up in underwater hazards or strainers.

Our local rivers may have currents that are deceptively strong and just a foot or two deep could have an aggressive and powerful current that goes with it. Anytime you, your children, or your pets are recreating near a body of water, make sure you have a personal flotation device. If you are anywhere near moving water, expect the unexpected. Expect that it is going to be stronger than you think it is and that it may very well sweep you away and please take necessary precautions to keep your family safe.