



**Pacific Gas and
Electric Company**



NEWS

Spring Snowmelt Prompts Water Safety Warning *Outdoor Recreationists Should Take Precautions Against Cold Temperatures, Swift Currents When in or Near Water*

Release Date: April 21, 2011

Contact: PG&E External Communications (415) 973-5930

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E), the California Department of Boating and Waterways (DBW) and California State Parks warn outdoor recreationists to take precautions this spring season. This year's abundant snowfall and spring snowmelt will result in swift and cold river flows that can create treacherous conditions for all recreationists – waders, swimmers, paddlers, boaters, anglers and even hikers cooling off at the water's edge.

The utility and state departments cautioned that the water content of California's mountain snowpack was at 163 percent of normal as of April 1 – the highest amount since 1995. As warmer weather and longer days begin melting snow in mountainous regions, water temperatures will continue to drop and flows will continue to rise in waterways and reservoirs. Reservoir operators have begun increasing water releases in anticipation of filling later in the spring. Most PG&E reservoirs are expected to fill and water to flow over dam spillways in the May through July period.

"Those planning outings near mountain streams, rivers and reservoirs need to be extra vigilant and take appropriate safety measures," said Alvin Thoma, director of PG&E's power generation department. "Water flows will fluctuate with the warming and cooling of the day so always be prepared for a change in conditions."

"Even experienced swimmers can get caught in swift river flows," said DBW's Acting Director Lucia C. Becerra. "Stay safe by checking [local conditions](#) before taking a boating trip, [wear a life jacket](#) and avoid alcohol."

"Spring is a wonderful time to visit our beautiful lakes and fast moving rivers," said Ruth Coleman, director of California State Parks. "But please read the safety tips in this water safety warning because making a mistake could kill you or a loved one."

Here are some safety tips:

Know the Water

- Sudden immersion in [cold water](#) can stimulate the "gasp reflex" causing an involuntary inhalation of air or water. It can even trigger cardiac arrest, temporary paralysis, hypothermia and drowning. When faced with swift water, even the strongest swimmers may be easily overwhelmed.
- Cold water entering the ear canal can cause vertigo and disorientation. This may confuse swimmers, causing them to venture deeper into the water.

Know your limits

- Swimming in open water is more difficult than in a swimming pool – people tire more quickly and can get into trouble.
- Cold water causes impairment leading to fatalities. It reduces body heat 25-30 times faster than air does at the same temperature.
- Many unseen obstacles can be lurking below the water's surface. Swift water can make these obstacles even more treacherous.

Wear a life jacket

- Conditions change quickly in open water and even the best swimmers can misjudge the water and their skills when boating or swimming. Wearing a life jacket can increase survival time.
- A life jacket can provide some thermal protection against the onset of hypothermia and keep you afloat until someone else can rescue you.

Parental Supervision

- Actively supervise children in and around open bodies of water, giving them your undivided attention. Appoint a designated "water watcher," taking turns with other adults.
- Teach children that swimming in open water is not the same as swimming in a pool: they need to be aware of uneven surfaces, river currents, ocean undertow and changing weather.

Know the Law

- A 2010 boating law states that children under age 13 must wear a life jacket when on a moving vessel that is 26 feet or less in length.
- Every person on board a personal watercraft (popularly known as "jet skis") and any person being towed behind a vessel must wear a Coast Guard-approved life jacket.
- It is against the law to operate a boat or water ski with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.08 percent or more. You can be arrested even when your BAC is less than 0.08 percent if conditions are deemed to be unsafe.

About DBW

DBW enhances public access to California's waterways and promotes on-the-water safety through programs funded by vessel registration fees, boating fuel tax dollars and boating facility construction loan payments. For more information, visit www.dbw.ca.gov.

About PG&E

Pacific Gas and Electric Company, a subsidiary of [PG&E Corporation](http://www.pge.com) (NYSE:PCG), is one of the largest combined natural gas and electric utilities in the United States. Based in San Francisco, with 20,000 employees, the company delivers some of the nation's cleanest energy to 15 million people in Northern and Central California. For more information, visit www.pge.com/about/.

About California State Parks

California State Parks manages 278 parks units in a system that contains 1.5 million acres, 300 miles of the California coastline, 640 miles of lakefront and more than 300 miles of rivers. More than 65-million people visited State Parks in 2010. For more information, visit www.parks.ca.gov.

-30-

NOTE TO MEDIA: Story opportunities on water safety can be scheduled with DBW.