

Farm Pond SAFETY



EMTs try to revive a drowning victim

Each year, drownings occur in farm ponds as families and children fish, swim, or play on piers and shores or in small boats. On average, 77 Mississippians die annually by drowning in farm ponds, small impoundments, lakes, and streams within the state. Five to eight deaths occur each year in the state while homeowners perform maintenance around farm ponds with tractors, mowers, and chemical applicators. In addition to the fatalities noted, diving accidents often leave victims paralyzed.

Mississippi's Privately Owned Ponds

Mississippi has a quarter of a million acres of small, privately owned farm ponds. Their size ranges from less than 1 acre to more than 100 acres; typical ponds have less than 40 surface acres. Farm ponds and small impoundments represent a larger total acreage of water than all of the public reservoirs and state-managed lakes combined.

Drownings in Mississippi

Most of the farm pond deaths could have been prevented with some simple safety precautions. Following are some facts about drownings in Mississippi:

- Most childhood drowning fatalities occur during a lapse of adult supervision.

- Four times as many males drown as females.
- Twice as many nonwhites drown as whites.
- Swimming mishaps account for 45 percent of drownings.
- Of all Mississippi drowning fatalities, 50 percent involve alcohol use.

Preventing Drownings

Be sure to follow these water safety measures:

- Learn to swim.
- Never swim alone.
- Maintain constant adult supervision of children near water.
- Keep small children away from buckets, tubs, and ponds that contain liquids.

- Prevent children's direct access to swimming areas without mature supervision.
- Before diving or jumping into water, check that it is deeper than 9 feet.

Marking Safe Areas

Mark safe swimming, wading, and diving areas with signs indicating water depth. Place signs that say "no diving" or "wading only." Mark deep areas with floats on a rope that are anchored, then restrict swimming beyond this line. Post signs on piers warning



Mark safe swimming areas by an anchored rope with floats

against diving if the water depth is less than 9 feet. Have a rescue station near each pier. Remove any stumps or underwater obstacles from the swimming and diving areas during construction or mark them with signs. Never dive, swim, or wade alone and post signs at the pond to that effect.



Setting Up Rescue Stations

At a pond, construct a rescue station near a pier, a swimming area, or an arrival spot, and post easily recognizable signs.

Attach to a pier an 8- to 10-foot-long wooden 4" x 4" post that is painted yellow, with black letters that read "Rescue." Or near the water's edge, put a sign on a similar post to identify rescue devices.

Have a life vest, a ring buoy, or a float with 20 feet of rope attached; a 12- to 20-foot rescue pole; and first-aid supplies within reach of a small child on shore whose parent or sibling is struggling in a pond. The rescue pole can be a stiff, blunt-end bamboo pole; an aluminum pole; or a 1-inch PVC pipe with end caps.

Because these devices float, they allow even the smallest child to "push" the pole out to a potential victim. A permanently fastened hook on the end of the rescue pole, to snag a person's clothes, can be used to fish out an unconscious victim.

To be effective, flotation devices need not be expensive or hard to find. They may be as simple as



A rescue using a PVC pipe

a plastic container with a screw-on cap and about 1 inch of water in the bottom for weight. Tie a knot or a short stick in the end of the rope that is not attached to the float to prevent the rope from slipping through the hands when thrown.

Plastic and PVC materials deteriorate in sunlight and become brittle over time. Protect flotation devices, especially milk jugs and PVC-pipe rescue poles, from sun exposure. Inspect and replace them periodically to maintain a reliable rescue device.



Throwing a float to swimmer in trouble

Train family members and frequent visitors in safe water rescue. Practice extending a rescue pole or throwing a float to a potential victim. Do not attempt a swimming rescue. Many would-be rescuers become drowning victims while struggling to rescue panicked swimmers.

Include in a first aid kit the usual treatments for cuts and scrapes, insect bites and stings, and snake bites.



Practicing Boat Safety

Small, unpowered boats on farm ponds can offer additional pleasure in fishing areas of the pond that are not accessible otherwise. Equip boats with oars or paddles and personal flotation devices for occupants as



Essential boat safety equipment includes a paddle or oar and life vests for all occupants

though they were on public waters. Never mix alcohol or drug consumption with water recreation activities.

A boat may serve also as a valuable rescue device when a potential victim is farther than can be reached from shore. When making a rescue with a boat, hold the person beside the boat until you can calm him or her enough to climb safely into the end of the boat. Climbing over the sides of small boats can capsize them.



Swimmers should always enter a boat from one end

Boats can also tempt children to take risks and can quickly extend their range beyond their ability to recover from dangerous situations. It is easy to overload a boat with children and pets. This is a vital concern if you misjudge a pond's depth, yet drowning accidents occur from this careless practice.



Lock boats to trees or other structures to prevent unauthorized use by untrained, unsupervised people

Operating Tractors and Machinery Safely

The five to eight deaths that are related to farm pond maintenance account for about one-fourth of all tractor and machinery deaths in the state each year. Tractors that roll over on steep levees and soft pond banks while mowing or spraying are the primary cause of these deaths. To prevent these fatalities, ensure that all tractors are equipped with rollover protective structures (ROPS) and seat belts. Use seat belts at all times when ROPS are present.



A tractor equipped with ROPS, seatbelt, and front wheel assist is safer to operate

These two modifications – ROPS and seat belts – to older tractors can be purchased for less than \$1,000. ROPS and seat belts were introduced to farm tractors in 1976. There has not been a single documented tractor-overturning death since then when both ROPS and seat belts were used on the tractor.

Proper pond construction with slopes no greater than 3:1 will minimize tractor overturns. An alert, skilled operator may prevent a tractor from overturn-



Yardsticks show the proper 3:1 slope of a levee to reduce tractor rollovers

ing. If the tractor operator is uncomfortable on a slope, he should not be there. Driving slowly will lessen the chances

of an overturn. If the uphill tire begins to spin when crossing a slope, turn the tractor downhill if there is a clear path to safety even if you are driving toward the shallow edge of a pond. Otherwise, stop the tractor immediately and get help to recover the tractor. Mow down steep slopes and back up, or return on a different, less steep route.

Never allow children to be passengers on tractors, riding mowers, or construction machinery. Do not allow children to operate this type of equipment until they are mentally and physically mature enough to cope with the dangers. Be aware of the additional dangers that farm ponds pose for machinery.



Mark eroded areas on pond banks

Where animal burrows are present, it is wise to scout the area and mark burrows and cave-ins before the operation begins. Spraying weeds instead of mowing also affords added safety because spray booms are used to extend the distance the tractor must operate from the shoreline. Staying a safe distance from the water's edge or from ditches or embankments also will decrease the chances of an overturn. As a rule, tractors and equipment should be no closer to the water's edge, ditch, or embankment than the depth of the water, ditch, or embankment height. For example, a tractor should get no closer than 6 feet to a 6-foot-deep pond bank.

Providing Security and Limiting Liability

Limit pond access by fencing and by selecting a remote location, if possible. Carefully screen individuals who will protect the property. Posting rules such as "No swimming alone," "Wear life preservers while in the boat or on the pier," and "No diving" will help remind visitors of safety. Do not allow anyone to fish or swim in your pond without an adult member of your immediate family being present. Caution pond visitors before they are allowed to enter the pond area that they **must** follow the rules **or** they will be **asked to leave**.



Posting pond rules is a reminder for all visitors to practice safety



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Accident statistics from the Mississippi Bureau of Vital Statistics

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By **Herb Willcutt**, Extension Professor and Agricultural Engineer, Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering

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