

Opinion: Tahoe doesn't have to be dangerous

By Cate Neal

A plunge into Lake Tahoe can literally take your breath away. It may be hot outside, but the lake can be dangerously cold. Lake Tahoe's average surface temperature in July is 63 degrees, and can drop to 53 degrees just 18 inches below the surface.



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One of the most dangerous consequences of submerging suddenly into cold water is a "cold-shock response." This response is an uncontrollable gasp for air followed by a prolonged period of rapid breathing. Taking a couple gasps of air underwater is all it takes to drown. Another "cold-shock response" is a heart attack. When temperature of the blood cools down and returns the heart, it can cause congestive heart failure.

So what can we learn from others who take a dangerous plunge?

Here are few tips for a fun and safe day at the lake:

- Ease in slowly. Take your time getting in the water. Give your body time to adjust to the cooler temperature.
- Follow the rules. Swimmers should stay in designated areas. If you are paddling, wear a personal flotation device. Non-motorized crafts have the right away, but be

aware of power boats.

- Watch for obstacles. If you are going to jump into the water, scout out any obstacles and jump in feet first. When paddling, know how to look for and avoid obstacles.
- Be weather aware. On Lake Tahoe, weather varies by the hour. Don't wait for the weather to change. Be aware of your surroundings and know the easiest way to shore.
- Skip swimming and drinking. Alcohol impairs judgment and increases risk-taking, a dangerous combination. Even experienced swimmers may venture out farther than they should. A leg cramp can make it challenging to get back to shore and even a chill can develop into hypothermia.
- Bring a buddy. Never swim alone. If you haven't seen your buddy for a couple of minutes, he or she may need your help.
- Supervise your children. Keep an eye on your children, especially if they are inexperienced swimmers. If possible, teach your little ones to swim at a young age.

Tahoe summers are a treasurable time with family and friends. You don't want to have children on an inflatable flamingo drag you to shore. Swim with caution and enjoy this magnificent lake.

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