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What is electric shock drowning and which organizations provide mitigation guidelines?

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Electric shock drowning – ESD – occurs when electric current from a boat or dock leaks into the water and incapacitates or electrocutes a nearby swimmer.

According to the Electric Shock Drowning Prevention Association (ESDPA), hundreds of injuries and deaths have been directly attributed to this danger over several decades. Additionally, this could be the cause of many other drownings that were not recognized at the time because of lack of knowledge of this threat.

It only takes a small amount of electric current to disable a swimmer who could then drown. Increasing the tragedy is when the distressed swimmer is observed by someone on shore or in a boat. The first reaction by many has been to jump into the water to save the person, only to become victims themselves.

NFPA 303, Fire Protection Standard for Marinas and Boatyards, along with ESPDA provide specific guidance to mitigate this largely unknown danger.

DISCLAIMER: This information reflects the interpretation of MSO, Inc. with regard to NFPA Standards and Codes and other code sources. It does not represent these code's official position on the items discussed.

Marina operations

