

The **Excelsior Fire Districts** asks. Do you know the difference between someone in **distress** and someone **drowning**?

The common myth that drowning victims can be spotted and heard in the water because they are waving their hands and screaming is just that, a myth. Hollywood's depiction of a drowning victim is fictitious and misleading. You must keep a watchful eye to spot a drowning victim.

Distress vs. Drowning

There are two basic water crisis, distress and drowning. Recognizing these situations may save someone's life.

A person in distress can support themselves in the water with swimming skills or floating. They can keep their heads above water to breath and can call out for help. They can wave for help. Distress victims need help, but are not yet in a life and death situation.

Drowning is suffocation in liquid. In an attempted to avoid suffocation, an instinctive response is triggered. The drowning sequence is as follows. The victim is in water over their head, they take a gulp of air and sink below the surface of the water. They want more air so they push down on the water with their arms extended to their sides. They resurface with their heads tilted back. They repeat the sinking and resurfacing sequence until they are rescued or drown. This is a silent process.

How to identify the instinctive drowning process.

- **Victims don't call out for help.**
 - The victims are in a life and death struggle and are not getting enough air to breath.
 - They do not have the extra air to call out for help.
 - Drowning is one of the life threatening situations where people can not indicate that they are in trouble.
- **Victims don't wave for help.**
 - They lose voluntary control of their arm movement.
 - Their arms are extended at their sides then over their heads as they sink.
 - They look like they are playing in the water because of the arm movements.
 - Drowning victims splash allot.
 - Splashing and the inability to call out for help and wave causes many nearby people to not recognize them as a drowning victim.
- **Victims only struggle for 20-60 seconds.**
 - The shorter than expected period of struggle contributes too many deaths.
- **Torso Reflex.**
 - This is an automatic gasp of air in response to being hit in the chest with cold water.
 - When someone, even a good swimmer, falls into the water, that gasp for air brings water into their mouth, lungs, and stomach.