

Dept. of Natural Resources: Boat responsibly; life jackets save lives

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MADISON, Wis. – National Safe Boating Week is May 21-27 and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) reminds boaters that [wearing a life jacket could save your life.](#)

It is human nature to think drowning can't happen to you. Most people who drown in boating accidents know how to swim but become incapacitated in the water such as being injured or unconscious, exhausted or weighed down by clothing.

So far this year, four people have died in boating incidents, and another 25 people died in 2021. Operator inexperience, inattention, recklessness and speeding are the four leading causes of tragic watercraft crashes, and the leading cause of death is drowning.

Boating is a big part of Wisconsin's culture and summer fun. With that comes the responsibility of making sure to operate your boat in a safe and responsible manner. Part of that is ensuring there are enough life jackets on board for everyone.

Nationally, 80% of all boating related fatalities are the direct result of drowning. Something as simple as wearing your life jacket can significantly mitigate that risk and prevent a fun summer outing from becoming a tragedy.

"Safety is an important part of water fun," said Lt. Darren Kuhn, DNR Boating Law Administrator. "Wisconsin rivers and lakes can be relaxing and family-friendly places to spend a summer day when you put safety first and respect the water."

The department does not track all drownings – only those fatalities linked to the use of a recreational activity item, such as a boat, kayak or canoe. [Boating incident reports to date for 2022 and previous years are available online here.](#)

Statistics show boaters who wear life jackets and take boater safety courses are most likely to stay safe on Wisconsin waters. New life jackets are much more comfortable, lightweight and stylish than the bulky orange style most boaters know. There are innovative options, such as inflatable life jackets, allowing mobility and flexibility for activities like boating, fishing, paddling or hunting and are much cooler in the warmer weather.

Follow the basic safety tips below and enjoy Wisconsin's open waters with family and friends.

WATER SAFETY TIPS

- [Sign up now to take an online boater education course.](#)
- Always wear a properly fitted life jacket that has a snug fit and is fastened when you're on or near the water. Life jackets will keep you on top of the water if you walk off an unexpected drop-off, or a wave or current overpowers you or you fall out of a boat.
- Enjoy the waters sober and know your limits. Alcohol blurs a person's judgment, reaction time and abilities.
- River shorelines and sandbars pose unseen dangers. Higher, fast-moving water can tax an individual's boating, paddling and swimming skills.
- Keep an eye on the weather and let someone know where you are going.

Be ready for the unexpected and always wear your life jacket. [More boating safety tips are available on the DNR website.](#)