

Dept. of Natural Resources: Life jackets save lives; make safety part of the fun

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MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources reminds anyone hitting the water this weekend to wear a life jacket.

Winds and summer-like temperatures are in the forecast for Saturday, making the water more inviting than ever after weeks of winter. While Saturday's temperatures may flirt with summer, the water is cold and rough, and life jackets are a must before you shove from the shore for the year's first paddle.

"Safety is an important part of water fun. Most drowning victims on Wisconsin waterbodies were not wearing life jackets," said DNR Lt. Darren Kuhn, DNR Boating Law Administrator. "Putting safety first by wearing a life jacket and having respect for the water are two important things to remember when going to any Wisconsin river and lake to enjoy warm spring days."

Nearly 80% of last year's 25 boating fatality victims were not wearing life jackets. Of those, 91% were male, with an average age of 46.

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. [Current and past boating incident reports are available on the DNR website.](#)

"Wardens have responded to numerous drowning deaths only to find a life jacket stuffed inside a kayak or floating near the capsized canoe," Kuhn said. "Deaths from drowning are preventable. Putting on a life jacket before wading, playing along shores or getting in a boat gets you ready to focus on the fun."

Today's life jackets are much more comfortable, lightweight and stylish. There are innovative options, such as inflatable life jackets, allowing mobility and flexibility for boating, fishing, paddling or hunting, and they are much cooler in the warmer weather.

Statistics show boaters who wear life jackets and take boater safety courses are most likely to stay safe on Wisconsin waters. Always follow the basic safety tips below and enjoy Wisconsin's great lakes and rivers 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 or off a paddleboard.
- 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.
- Consider wind conditions when venturing out on a small watercraft, canoe, kayak or paddleboard.
- Be ready for the unexpected and always wear your life jacket.