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DNR: Waterfowl hunters: Wear your life jackets

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MADISON, Wis. – With more than 74,000 waterfowl hunters expected on waterways this year, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is reminding waterfowl hunters to follow best safety practices as they hit the water this upcoming season.

Wisconsin has had 17 boating accident deaths so far this year, according to DNR records. It's important for hunters to follow these safety tips to prevent boating accidents and deaths:

1. Be aware that water temperatures are rapidly cooling at this time of year. A fall overboard can turn dangerous quickly as hypothermia sets in. Wearing a life jacket can keep individuals on the surface and allow energy to be used to keep warm rather than to stay above the water.
2. Remember to protect canine companions on the water – they need life jackets, too.
3. Never overload the boat. If hunting on a large river or lake, use a boat that is big enough to handle rough water.
4. Balance the boat evenly and keep weight low for stability.
5. Be on the lookout for elements outside of your control, such as changing weather, or a slightly submerged stump, rock, sandbar or floating debris.
6. If in a boat or canoe with a hunting partner, establish and communicate a safe fire zone; do not stand to shoot if a partner is shooting from a seated position.
7. Always carry a cell phone so communication can happen in case of an emergency.

"With hunting dogs on board or other weather-related challenges, a boat can capsize, and things can take a turn for the worse quickly," said Lt. Darren Kuhn,

DNR Boating Safety Administrator. “No matter the skill level or years of hunting, waterfowl hunters should always wear their life jackets,”

Hunters should also be aware of the danger of waders on the water. If a boat capsizes and the hunter is ejected, waders can fill with water, creating suction around the hunter’s legs and feet, making it difficult to remove the waders. This added water weight greatly increases the risk of drowning. Wearing a life jacket can help keep hunters afloat.

One wearable life jacket is required for each person on board a boat and must fit properly. In addition to the wearable life jackets, a throwable personal flotation device, such as a ring buoy or standard seat cushion, is required for every boat longer than 16 feet.

For a complete guide to regulations and law changes, reference the 2022 Combined Wisconsin Hunting Regulations booklet.