

Dept. of Natural Resources: Life jackets save lives

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MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) urges all water enthusiasts to wear a life jacket any time you are on the water, because it could save your life.

It's National Safe Boating Week, and the DNR anticipates an increase in boating, paddling and water fun activities heading into Memorial Day weekend.

Before you cast off, perform a general boat check to make sure it's ready to launch. Look all other safety equipment is on board, lights are functional, registration is current, engine cut-off lanyard and plug are present – and don't forget to make sure you have one life jacket per person on board.

"When something goes wrong, it's too late to put a life jacket on if you aren't already wearing it," said Lt. Darren Kuhn, DNR Boating Law Administrator.

"Wardens have responded to numerous drowning deaths only to find a life jacket stuffed inside a kayak or floating near the capsized canoe."

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. The DNR posts [boating incident reports](#) on its website.

Today's life jackets are more comfortable, lightweight and stylish than the bulky orange style of the past. There are innovative options, such as inflatable life jackets, allowing mobility and flexibility for activities like boating, fishing, paddling or hunting and are cooler in the warmer weather.

Follow the basic safety tips below and enjoy Wisconsin's great lakes and rivers with family and friends.

- [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 overpower 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.](#)