



May 2014

Boating Season is Here in Illinois

Whether paddling a canoe on a quiet stream, motoring across the lake to your favorite fishing spot, or piloting a pontoon for a family outing on the water, boating is one of the great ways many of us enjoy spending time outdoors.

Our state's busiest boating season is here – and while the week before Memorial Day each year is National Safe Boating Week, we want boaters to keep safety in mind throughout the year.

Illinois had 65 boating accidents last year (Federal Fiscal Year 2013), in which there were 50 injuries and 14 fatalities. In 2012, Illinois reported 101 boating accidents in which there were 69 injuries and 19 fatalities. Of the 14 fatalities in 2013, 12 of those victims may have survived if they had been wearing personal flotation devices (PFDs).

The theme for National Safe Boating Week is a repeat from last year, but it's a theme worth repeating: "WEAR IT! ALWAYS WEAR YOUR LIFE JACKET" as a reminder of the life-saving value of life jackets, or PFDs.

State law in Illinois requires you to have a PFD available for each person on your boat. Make sure you have the kind of life jacket appropriate for the kind of boating you're doing – whether floating, kayaking, water skiing or fishing. And remember that you must wear a life jacket if you're operating a personal watercraft/jet ski.

Sober boating is also a must. Three of last year's Illinois boating fatalities involved alcohol or drug impairment. In an effort to keep our waters safe, Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Conservation Police spend a lot of time on the water enforcing safe boating laws, including arresting impaired boat operators. Last year, Conservation Police made 115 boater arrests for operating under the influence (OUI) of alcohol or drugs, while other law enforcement agencies made another 67 OUI arrests on Illinois waters.

The IDNR coordinates free boating safety education courses. Passing a course is required for youth ages 12 to 17 before they can operate a motor boat, and taking and passing the course is a great idea for boaters of any age. Check the IDNR website for course dates, locations and details.

Wear your life jacket, stay sober, and enjoy a great boating season on the waters of Illinois!

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