

Safety on the water in Illinois means sober boat operators, wearing life jackets

May 19 2016 12:41 PM



National Safe Boating Week is May 21-27

SPRINGFIELD – Boaters can enjoy a safe season on the water in Illinois this summer if boat operators are sober and all boaters and boat passengers wear life jackets. Illinois Conservation Police officers, who patrol waterways throughout the state, are reminding boaters of safety laws and regulations leading up to National Safe Boating Week, May 21-27.

“We encourage safe boating throughout the year in Illinois, and reminders about life jackets and sober boating are particularly important heading into the busiest season of the year on the water,” said Illinois Conservation Police Chief Rafael Gutierrez. “Like fastening a seat belt in your car or truck, fastening a life jacket can save your life; and, staying sober while operating a boat is the law in Illinois.”

Statistics compiled by the IDNR Office of Law Enforcement show that there were 74 boating-related accidents on Illinois waters in 2015 resulting in 49 injuries and 14

fatalities. During the last five years, Illinois had an annual average of 84 boating accidents resulting in 58 injuries and 18 fatalities. (Annual boating accident statistics are compiled based on the Federal Fiscal Year of October 1 through September 30).

Illinois Conservation Police officers (CPOs) in 2015 made 179 arrests for boaters operating under the influence (OUI), a 12.5 percent increase in OUI arrests from 2014.

IDNR statistics indicate six of the 14 boating-related fatalities in Illinois last year involved alcohol or drug impairment, while 13 of the 14 people who died in boating accidents may have survived if they had worn a life jacket or other personal flotation device (PFD).

Illinois law requires that PFDs – life jackets or life vests – be available for each person aboard a boat or other watercraft. State law also requires that anyone under the age of 13 must wear a life jacket while aboard any watercraft under 26 feet in length at all times the boat is underway, unless they are below deck in an enclosed cabin or operating on private property. Illinois law also requires persons of any age to wear a PFD while operating a personal watercraft or Jet Ski.

The IDNR offers free boating safety courses providing a review of boating laws and regulations and instruction on safe and attentive operation of watercraft. The IDNR encourages boaters of all ages to take a safety course. Anyone born on or after January 1, 1998 must pass a course and have a valid Boating Safety Certificate to operate a motorboat (with over 10 horsepower); and, state law requires boating safety education for persons ages 12 to 17 to operate a motorboat.

The free safety courses taught by volunteer instructors are available throughout Illinois, and schedules are available by checking the IDNR website's boating information page at <http://www.dnr.illinois.gov/safety/Pages/BoatingSafety.aspx>

For a fee, online boating safety courses are also available.

National Safe Boating Week is observed each year during the week leading up to the Memorial Day holiday weekend. For more information on the national safe boating campaign, go to the website at www.safeboatingcampaign.com.

To review a copy of the *Illinois DNR Boating Report 2015*, compiled by the IDNR Office of Law Enforcement, go to the IDNR website: <http://www.dnr.illinois.gov/safety/Documents/BoatingAccidentReport2015.pdf>