



Keep Drinks Dry on the Water This Summer

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DEPARTMENT OF

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SPRINGFIELD – As summer heats up and Illinoisans hit the water to celebrate Independence Day, Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Conservation Police Officers are reminding boat operators to always drive sober while on the water.

“When we talk about drunk driving, most people immediately associate it with getting behind the wheel of a car, but they should remember the same problems occur when boat operators drive drunk,” said Lt. Curt Lewis, boating law administrator, Illinois Conservation Police. “Just like a car or truck, boats are large, heavy machinery that become extremely dangerous to operate when you’re under the influence.

“Too often, boating accidents and fatalities in Illinois happen because boat operators are impaired while driving their watercraft,” Lewis added. “We understand people want to enjoy the water with family and friends, we just ask that they do it responsibly. The safety of their family, friends and other boaters depends on it.”

Already this year, Conservation Police Officers have made 17 arrests for operating under the influence – 10 in June alone. Last year, Conservation Police Officers made 103 arrests for boaters operating under the influence (OUI). Additionally, Conservation Police Officers in 2019 issued 725 citations and 2,623 warnings in enforcement of Illinois boating safety laws.

Lewis said Illinois Conservation Police will be out in force during the Fourth of July holiday, not only checking for impaired boat operators, but also making safety checks on watercraft throughout the state.

Next to boating sober, wearing a personal floatation device – or life jacket – is one of the easiest ways to stay safe on the water. Illinois requires that properly fitting U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets or vests must 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 boating safety courses that provide a review of boating laws and regulations, as well as instructions on safe and attentive operation of watercraft and encourages boaters of all ages to take a safety course. Anyone born on or after Jan. 1, 1998 must pass a course and have a valid Boating Safety Certificate to operate a motorboat (with over 10 horsepower).

While the IDNR normally offers free boating safety courses taught by volunteer instructors, those courses are suspended at this time due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When the courses resume, schedules will be available on the IDNR website's boating information page. For a fee, online boating safety courses are available.