



IDNR Conservation Police Step Up Enforcement Patrols as Busy Boating Season Begins

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SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Conservation Police have stepped up patrols and are reminding boaters to play it safe while enjoying their time on the water as part of National Safe Boating Week, May 22-28.

“While we look forward to observing Memorial Day and the start of the summer outdoor recreation season, our busy boating season in Illinois is already underway, and we want boaters to be safe on the water throughout the year,” **said IDNR Director Colleen Callahan.** “IDNR Conservation Police will be out on the water with you, reminding boat operators to be safe and sober, and reminding everyone aboard the boat to keep safety in mind.”

A year ago, IDNR Conservation Police investigated 81 boating accidents involving 36 injuries and 21 fatalities. Nationally, the U.S. Coast Guard notes that drowning was the reported cause of death in four out of every five recreational boating fatalities in 2019, and that 86 percent of those who drowned were not wearing life jackets.

Top boating safety reminders:

- Wear a life jacket. Wearing a Coast Guard-approved personal floatation device (PFD) is one of the simple things you can do whether you’re solo in a kayak, paddling with the family in a canoe, or operating a larger boat on a busy lake or river. PFDs are required on jet skis and wave runners. PFDs for everyone aboard the boat are required, and kids under 13 must wear a life jacket whenever a boat is underway.
- Motor boat operators should make sure all the required equipment is aboard, including a properly charged fire extinguisher, working horn and whistle, working navigation lights, and flares.
- A new federal law requires engine cut-off switches (ECOS) and links or lanyards that shut the boat motor off if the boat operator is displaced from the helm, preventing runaway boats from causing damage or injuries.
- Stay sober. Just like driving a car or truck, you can’t operate a boat under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Conservation Police arrested more than 100 boaters on charges of operating under the influence (OUI) last year.

“The best way for boaters to enjoy their time on the water this summer is to follow the rules,” **said IDNR Law Enforcement Director Timothy Tyler.** “Our Conservation Police Officers will be diligent in enforcing the law when it comes to sober boating. Anyone operating a boat under the influence of alcohol or drugs will be subject to arrest. The message for boat operators is simple – and bears repeating: If you booze, you lose.”

Boat operators must also follow the laws regarding careless or reckless operation, overloading a boat, observing restricted areas and no-wake zones, and adhering to other navigation rules, Tyler added.

The Handbook of Illinois Boating Laws and Responsibilities has details on what boaters can and cannot do in Illinois. The handbook is available on the IDNR website at <https://www2.illinois.gov/dnr/boating/Documents/BoatDigest.pdf>

The annual Illinois *Recreational Boating Report* for Federal Fiscal Year 2020, with information on boating accidents, enforcement and safety, is available on the IDNR website at <https://www2.illinois.gov/dnr/safety/Documents/BoatingAccidentReport2020.pdf>