



**US Army Corps
of Engineers®**
St. Louis District

News Release

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Water Safety Necessary for Safe Holiday

St. Louis – The 2007 recreation season was an especially difficult one for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers St. Louis District as eight water-related fatalities occurred at projects within the District's area of responsibility, the highest fatality rate in 10 years. Causes included swimming in designated and undesignated areas without a life jacket, exceeding swimming abilities, falls from docks and falling overboard from a boat, as well as a boating accident linked to loss of boat control.

“Park Rangers do everything possible to carry the message of water safety,” said Peggy O’Bryan, chief of the District’s Operations Division. “Our rangers incorporate water safety messages into all aspects of outreach and education at the projects but accidents do occur. It is vital that our visitors practice personal boating and water safety and remain vigilant both in and around the water.”

Advice O’Bryan gave included telling parents to watch their children and never let them swim outside of the swimming beach – especially in coves. She also cautioned young people from daring one another to swim outside the buoy line or jumping into water not knowing the depth or location of possible underwater obstructions.

President George W. Bush signed a proclamation May 15, making May 17-23 National Safe Boating Week. He sited recreational boating as one of the nation’s most popular pastimes, and encouraged all Americans “to take preventive measures such as wearing a life jacket, never boating under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and taking a boating safety course.”

“During National Safe Boating Week and throughout the year, I urge all Americans to put safety first when enjoying our country’s magnificent waters,” the President’s proclamation states.

National Safe Boating Week is an annual nationwide event that precedes Memorial Day weekend and is dedicated to raising the awareness of boating safety. The campaign’s theme, “Wear It!” is designed to emphasize the importance of each boater and non-swimmers wearing a life jacket.

According to U.S. Coast Guard 2006 statistics, water-related deaths are up for the second consecutive year, 710 deaths in 2006 compared with 697 in 2005. Overall, two-thirds of all fatal boating accident victims drowned. Of those who drowned, 90 percent were not wearing their life jacket. Wearing a life jacket is the single most important thing recreational boaters can do to increase their chances of surviving an accident on the water.

Gone are the days of bulky orange “horse collar” life jackets. Modern life jackets are available in a wide variety of compact, lightweight, and attractive styles suitable for constant wear. Many are partially or wholly inflatable, and resemble a wide set of suspenders or even a belt pack. Special varieties are made for anglers, hunters, skiers, and other sports enthusiasts.

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“If you think about it, a modern life jacket is a lot less restrictive than the automobile lap and shoulder belt most of us wear without a second thought,” says Virgil Chambers, Executive Director of the National Safe Boating Council, an umbrella group representing boating safety advocates throughout North America. “After a few minutes you forget you’re wearing one,” adds Chambers. “But if you happen to be involved in a boating accident, you’ll be very glad it’s on.”

Below are safety tips from the Army Corps of Engineers to help recreation seekers stay safe in the water over the Memorial Day holiday weekend and into the summer.

Alcohol and water don't mix

Alcohol use is the leading contributing factor in nearly 20 percent of all boating accidents. Just one beer can impair balance, vision, judgment, and reaction time. Research shows that four hours of boating produces fatigue that simulates drunkenness. Boating fatigue combined with alcohol consumption intensifies the effects of both and increases accident risks.

Boaters

Boaters should take appropriate safety classes, be familiar with governing state laws and have proper safety equipment onboard before boating. Seventy percent of reported fatalities occurred on boats where the operator had not received boating safety instruction, according to USCG statistics.

Within the St. Louis area it is important for boaters to know Missouri and Illinois state laws. Many states require boater education or boat operator licenses. As an added incentive, most insurance companies offer discounts to boaters who have successfully completed a boating safety course.

Wear a life jacket – don’t just carry one on board. Make sure it is U.S. Coast Guard approved and appropriately sized. Most states, including Illinois, require children under the age of 13 to wear life jackets. In Missouri, the state law requires children under 7 to wear life jackets.

Don't overload the boat (consider boat size, the number of passengers, and extra equipment before loading). Check your boat for all required safety equipment. Carry a set of navigational charts. Check the weather forecast. File a float plan with family or friends who are not on the vessel.

Swimming and Knowing Your Limits

At Army Corps of Engineers sites, swimming in non-designated areas is the highest (47%) cause for all water-related fatalities nationwide. Of all swimming-related fatalities, 87 percent of those were in non-designated swimming areas. Don't take chances by over-estimating swimming skills, and swim only in designated areas.

According to the Center for Disease Control, drowning is our nation's sixth leading cause of unintentional injury death for all ages. It is the second leading cause for those in the 1-4 and 10-14 year old age groups. It is the third leading cause for those less than 1, 5-9, and 15-34 years old. Watch your children at all times when around the water. It takes an average of 20 seconds for a child to drown.

Never dive into lakes and rivers. Never rely on toys such as inner tubes and water wings to stay afloat. Reach or throw a flotation device to help someone in trouble. Don't go in the water! Never swim alone.

Water Safety, Everyone's Responsibility

Water safety must be a top priority for everyone using the nation's waterways and lakes this summer. An estimated 360 million people visit U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recreation areas annually. Corps statistics show that most drownings occur during peak visitation, on weekends during the months of April through September. Fifty percent of all incidents occur between June and July when the projects are the busiest and water temperatures are warmest. Males constitute 89 percent of all Corps water-related fatalities.

Please make your visit to any recreation area a safe and enjoyable one. Taking water safety precautions saves lives – maybe your own.

For additional information about Corps projects, visit <http://www.corpslakes.us>. Reservations for camping may be made at 1-877-444-6777, or on the internet at: www.recreation.gov.

The St. Louis District project offices offer on-site water safety programs on weekends during the recreation season. The public is encouraged to call for additional information.

Illinois:

Carlyle Lake	618-594-2484
Lake Shelbyville	217-774-3951
National Great Rivers Museum	618-462-6979
Rend Lake	618-724-2493

Missouri:

Mark Twain Lake	573-735-4097
Rivers Project Office	636-899-2600
Wappapello Lake	573-222-8562

The St. Louis District is federal steward to over 300,000 acres of public lands and waters. This includes 5 multipurpose reservoirs, 5 navigational projects, 80 miles on the Illinois River, 36 miles on the Kaskaskia River, and 300 miles on the Mississippi River. Carlyle, Rend, and Shelbyville lakes are in Illinois. Mark Twain and Wappapello lakes are in Missouri. The district hosts more than 17 million visits per year. According to visitation reports, 60 percent of these visitors engage in aquatic recreational pursuits such as swimming, boating, or fishing.

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For more tips on water safety, visit the Corps' water safety web site: <http://watersafety.usace.army.mil/>

Visit www.cgau.org for information on boating classes.

View the Coast Guard federal regulations governing boating at: <http://www.uscgboating.org/>

U.S. Coast Guard statistics are available online:
http://www.uscgboating.org/statistics/Boating_Statistics_2006.pdf

Visit www.SafeBoatingCampaign.com for campaign materials and additional safe boating resources.