

Safe Kids Columbia Gorge recognized nationally for their support of the Corps of Engineers water safety efforts

Amber Tilton, a park ranger at The Dalles Lock and Dam partnered with members from the Safe Kids Columbia Gorge to host a booth at Cherry Fest, an annual celebration held every summer in The Dalles, OR. The Corps and Safe Kids Columbia Gorge urged visitors to 'buckle up for safety' by demonstrating the proper use and fit of life jackets and car seats.



Photo by Amber Tilton, The Dalles Lock and Dam

The Safe Kids Columbia Gorge has partnered with park rangers from The Dalles Lock and Dam since 2008, helping to promote water safety to local communities throughout the Columbia Gorge – an area encompassing five counties in both Oregon and Washington along the Columbia River.

In 2013, it seemed only natural for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to recognize Safe Kids for their commitment to water safety by nominating them for a Water Safety Award of Merit through the National Water Safety Congress.

"The partnership with Safe Kids has been a successful and productive one," said Kelly Thomas, the natural resources manager at the dam. "Safe Kids has worked with us to staff educational booths at local outreach events, has included our information and resources about water safety on their website and has also provided the Corps with donated supplies and materials. Without them, our water safety program in the local community would not be as successful."

Safe Kids actively contributes to the Corps' Water Safety Program in a number of ways. They support an annual water safety poster contest held at The Dalles Middle School by supplying poster materials and awarding the grand prize winners with free life jackets. The posters, made on brown paper bags, are distributed to the local farmers market and food bank, which in turn, helps spread the water safety message even further into the community.



Park Ranger Amber Tilton, The Dalles Lock and Dam, and Oregon State Trooper Michael Holloran (also a member of the Safe Kids Columbia Gorge) proudly pose in front of a newly-installed Life Jacket Loaner Board at Riverfront Park in The Dalles, OR

One of their most significant contributions to the region, however, was their establishment and implementation of a Life Jacket Loaner Board Program in the Columbia Gorge. With guidance from the Corps they purchased and installed eight life jacket loaner stations at local swim beaches and boat launches in both Oregon and Washington.

Visitation estimates indicate that more than 700,000 people visited these eight locations from May through August 2013 – and were able to access and borrow a life jacket (if they didn't already have one) while recreating on the Columbia River.

"The Corps' nationwide life jacket loaner board program has proven to help reduce water-related fatalities," said Melissa Rinehart, a natural resources manager in the Portland District's Natural Resource Management Office. "If you provide the public with safe options for recreating, they'll use it – and we're lucky to have partners like Safe Kids to help us implement these programs at the local level."

The National Water Safety Congress agrees; they recently recognized the Safe Kids Columbia Gorge chapter for their outstanding efforts, accomplishments and contributions to the Corps of Engineers water safety mission, honoring them with an Award of Merit.

For specific details about the Corps of Engineers' Life Jacket Loaner Board Program in the Columbia Gorge, visit <http://www.nwp.usace.army.mil/About/WaterSafety.aspx> under the module titled "Borrow a life jacket."