

Wear life jackets and stay sober while boating in Illinois

May 22 2018 10:59 AM

SPRINGFIELD – Illinois Conservation Police officers are reminding boaters to wear life jackets, and for boat operators to stay sober, as Illinois' busiest boating season begins with the upcoming Memorial Day weekend. The reminders come as part of National Safe Boating Week, May 19-25.

“Wearing a life jacket can save your life, and just like being sober while driving your truck or car to the boat ramp, it is against the law to drive or operate a boat while under the influence of alcohol or drugs,” said Illinois Conservation Police Chief Rafael Gutierrez. “Our Conservation Police Officers will be patrolling Illinois waterways all summer long to encourage boaters to stay safe and enjoy their time on the water.”

Statistics compiled by the IDNR Office of Law Enforcement show that there were 80 boating-related accidents in Illinois in 2017 resulting in 48 injuries and 12 fatalities. Annual boating accident statistics are compiled based on the Federal Fiscal Year of October 1 through September 30.

Conservation Police officers (CPOs) in 2017 issued 1,355 citations and 4,886 warnings in enforcement of Illinois boating safety laws. CPOs made 145 arrests for boaters operating under the influence (OUI) in 2017.

IDNR statistics indicate that 10 of the 12 people who died in boating accidents last year may have survived if they had worn a life jacket or other personal flotation device (PFD); three of the 12 boating-related fatalities involved alcohol or drug impairment.

Illinois law requires that properly-fitting U.S. Coast Guard-approved 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 that provide a review of boating laws and regulations, as well as instructions 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 <https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/safety/Pages/BoatingSafety.aspx>

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

There were 248,696 registered boats in Illinois in 2017, and the IDNR issued more than 74,000 Water Usage Stamps, which were required for non-powered watercraft. Water Usage Stamps will no longer be required in Illinois beginning on June 1.

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