

## **Water and Boat Safety**

Minnesota is the land of over 12,000 lakes, 25,000 miles of streams and rivers as well as quite a few pools and water parks. Water sports and boating are one of the best ways to enjoy our wonderful summers. There are nearly 900,000 watercraft registered with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

As you, your family and your friends venture into the waters in and around Minnesota, please take some precautions to ensure that you stay safe and healthy!

- Children should always be supervised around water. Small children can easily drown in less than a few inches of water. Teach your children to swim or get them to take lessons.
- Never swim alone or allow your children to swim alone. Even proficient swimmers can tire easily and could run into hazards in the water.
- If you are in a river, stream or lake beware of drop offs and currents. Some bodies of water can have undercurrents that could catch a swimmer unawares.
- Make sure that your pool or spa is fenced off and has gates that can be locked.
- Know basic water first aid. Be aware of what to do if you see someone is having difficulty staying above water. Call a lifeguard or be prepared to throw a floatation device to the swimmer.
- Take caution when diving to ensure that the water depth is deep enough so that you or others will not be injured. Many accidents occur when people dive into water whose depth is unknown.
- When using a slide, always enter the water feet first to prevent head injuries.
  
- Water and alcohol do not mix! Never operate a boat or personal water craft when drinking. Not only is it dangerous, it's against the law.
- Ensure that your watercraft has the required personal flotation devices or life jackets on board.
  - Children under the age of 10 are required to wear a life jacket while on any boat in Minnesota.
  - While adults are not required to wear life jackets, it is mandatory to have a life jacket within reach for each adult on a boat.
  - It is mandatory for boats over 16 feet in length to have a throwable device on board.
- Ensure that your watercraft has the required safety equipment on board. Remember your boat can be inspected at any time by a DNR officer to ensure compliance with the law. You may also want to have other safety related equipment on board that is recommended but not required.
- Follow all posted buoys or signage on the body of water you are on. Explanations of the signage are available from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.
- Know and follow the rules for operating your personal watercraft. Online courses are available for new boat owners and new owners of jet skis.
- Most boating fatalities and accidents that occur in personal watercraft with 40 horsepower or more engines are from collisions (either with another boat, fixed object or a swimmer) and fires.
- Most boating fatalities and accidents that occur in personal watercraft with less than 40 horsepower engines or non-motorized are from capsizing (tipping over), persons falling overboard, or swamping (when a boat takes in water too quickly).
- When operating a canoe, always wear your life jacket as occasional dunking should be expected.
- When canoeing, do not attempt waters beyond your ability – gradually progress to more difficult water as your skill level improves.

Remember – Safety is NO Accident!

*Information courtesy of the Minnesota Safety Council and National Safety Council*