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Stay Sober, Wear Life Jackets While Boating in Illinois *National Safe Boating Week is May 20-26*

SPRINGFIELD, IL – Illinois Conservation Police officers are reminding boaters that safety on the water in Illinois starts with boat operators staying sober and all boaters wearing life jackets. Illinois' busiest boating season is about to begin, and waterway safety reminders are part of the observance of National Safe Boating Week, May 20-26.

“It takes only a few seconds to fasten a life jacket, and wearing a life jacket can save your life,” said Illinois Conservation Police Chief Rafael Gutierrez. “In addition, just like driving a car or truck, staying sober while operating a boat is the law in Illinois.”

Statistics compiled by the IDNR Office of Law Enforcement show that there were 73 boating-related accidents in Illinois in 2016 resulting in 36 injuries and 11 fatalities. The number of boating-related accidents last year was below the five-year average, and compares with 74 accidents with 49 injuries and 14 fatalities in 2015. (Annual boating accident statistics are compiled based on the Federal Fiscal Year of October 1 through September 30).

In enforcing Illinois boating laws, Conservation Police officers (CPOs) in 2016 issued 1,721 citations and 5,258 warnings. CPOs made 147 arrests for boaters operating under the influence (OUI) in 2016.

IDNR statistics indicate that eight of the 11 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 11 boating-related fatalities involved alcohol or drug impairment.

Illinois law requires that properly-fitting 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 providing a review of boating laws and regulations and instruction 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 248,948 registered boats in Illinois in 2016, and the IDNR issued 58,067 annual Water Usage Stamps, which are required for non-powered watercraft.

To review a copy of the latest edition of the *Illinois DNR Boating Report*, compiled by the IDNR Office of Law Enforcement, go to the IDNR website: <https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/safety/Documents/BoatingAccidentReport2016.pdf>

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.

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