



Illinois Department of Natural Resources

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IDNR Reminds Boaters to Wear Life Jackets and Stay Sober *National Safe Boating Week is May 18-24*

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Illinois Conservation Police Officers (CPOs) are reminding boat operators to always drive sober and to wear life jackets – life-saving reminders heading into the state’s busiest boating season.

Illinois will join in the observance of National Safe Boating Week, May 18-24, leading into the Memorial Day holiday weekend (May 25-27).

“Our Illinois Conservation Police step up water patrols throughout the summer months to remind boaters to stay safe and enjoy their time outdoors,” said Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Director Colleen Callahan. “We remind boaters that wearing a life jacket can save their lives, and that it is against the law to drive or operate a boat while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.”

Statistics compiled by the IDNR Office of Law Enforcement show 68 boating-related accidents in Illinois in 2018, resulting in 34 injuries and 18 fatalities. Annual boating accident statistics are compiled based on the Federal Fiscal Year of October 1 through September 30.

CPOs in 2018 issued 1,045 citations and 3,753 warnings in enforcement of Illinois boating safety laws. CPOs made 124 arrests for boaters operating under the influence (OUI) in 2018.

What’s more, IDNR statistics indicate that 16 of the 18 people who died in boating accidents last year may have survived if they had worn a life jacket or other personal flotation device (PFD); four of the 18 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 and encourages boaters of all ages to take a safety course. Anyone born on or after Jan. 1, 1998 must pass a course and have a valid Boating Safety Certificate to operate a motorboat (with over 10 horsepower).

The free safety courses, taught by volunteer instructors, are available throughout Illinois; 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 also are available.

There were 245,621 registered boats in Illinois in 2018.

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, visit www.safeboatingcampaign.com.

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