



# Illinois Department of Natural Resources

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Summer Boating Safety Starts With Wearing Life Jackets, Staying Sober

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – During the Independence Day holiday weekend and throughout the busy summer boating season, Illinois Conservation Police remind boat operators and passengers to stay sober and wear life jackets while on the water.

“The last week in June was a particularly sad week for our officers,” said Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Director of Law Enforcement Jerry Costello. “Illinois Conservation Police were called in to lead or assist in recovery for nearly ten water- and boat-related fatalities across the state. Heading into a holiday weekend, where we expect to see increased traffic on our lakes and rivers, these incidents provide a stark reminder of the importance of boating safely.”

Boat operators should check to make sure watercraft have the correct number of personal flotation devices (PFDs) on board, said Costello, adding that 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.

Still, Costello said, life jackets aren’t the only consideration when reviewing boating safety.

“Too many boating accidents and boating fatalities in Illinois involve boat operators who are impaired while driving their watercraft,” Costello said. “For your safety, the safety of family and friends on your boat, and the safety of other boaters, please stay sober behind the wheel. We want boaters on Illinois waterways to enjoy the holiday this week, we just ask that they do it responsibly.”

Illinois Conservation Police will be out in force during the Fourth of July holiday, making safety checks on watercraft throughout the state. With the added challenge of flooded waterways in many areas,

Costello said boaters should pay close attention to potential dangers in the water as they navigate the state's rivers and lakes.

“The 2019 boating season has been especially challenging because of the weather and flooding in Illinois,” Costello added. “When waterways are open, please be alert to potential dangers related to high water, including strong currents, floating debris, and submerged objects that could pose dangers to you and the passengers on your boat.”

For more information on boating safety in Illinois, check the IDNR website at <https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/safety/Pages/BoatingSafety.aspx>

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