



BOATING SAFETY TIPS

BOATING IN WISCONSIN



Keep the fun on the water coming -- whether it's a fishing boat, a canoe, or a personal watercraft that "floats your boat," operator inexperience, inattention, recklessness and speeding are the four leading causes of tragic watercraft crashes and the leading cause of death is drowning.

Crash statistics indicate boaters who wear life jackets and take boater safety courses are most likely to stay safe on Wisconsin waters. Follow these basic safety tips and enjoy Wisconsin's great lakes and rivers with family and friends.

LEAVE ALCOHOL ONSHORE

- Never use drugs or alcohol before or during boat operation. Alcohol's effects are greatly exaggerated by exposure to sun, glare, wind, noise, and vibration.

USE AND MAINTAIN THE RIGHT SAFETY EQUIPMENT

- Have a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket for each person onboard and one approved throwable device for any boat 16 feet and longer. The DNR recommends that everyone wear their life jackets while on the water.
- Have a fire extinguisher.
- Have operable boat lights - Always test boat lights before the boat leaves the dock and carry extra batteries.
- Emergency supplies - Keep on board in a floating pouch: cellphone, maps, flares and first aid kit.

PADDLE BOARD SAFETY TIPS

- Wear a life jacket! - More than 90% of boat fatalities related to drowning involve victims not wearing life jackets. You need one for your safety. You also need one because Wisconsin law, as well as U.S. Coast Guard law, treats paddleboards the same as kayaks and canoes. This means

there must be a personal flotation device for each person on board. However, the best way to obey this law and to ensure your safety is to just wear the life jacket.

- Carry a whistle
- Be a competent swimmer
- Know how to self-rescue
- Know how to tow another board
- Know the local regulations and navigation rules
- Understand the elements and hazards – winds, tidal ranges, current, terrain
- Know when to wear a leash
- Be defensive – don't go where you aren't supposed to be and avoid other swimmers, boaters, paddleboards
- Use proper blade angle to be the most efficient paddle boarder
- And, take a safety course, [Paddling Safety Course](#)^[exit DNR]

BE WEATHER WISE

- Regardless of the season, keep a close eye on the weather and bring a radio. Sudden wind shifts, lightning flashes and choppy water all can mean a storm is brewing. If bad weather is approaching, get off the water early to avoid a long waiting line in inclement weather.

TAKE THESE STEPS BEFORE GETTING UNDERWAY

- Tell someone where you are going and when you will return.
- Open all hatches and run the blower after you refuel and before getting underway. Sniff for fumes before starting the engine and if you smell fumes, do not start the engine.
- Check the boat landing for any local regulations that apply. If boating on the Great Lakes or Mississippi River, review the federal regulations for additional requirements.

LOADING AND UNLOADING YOUR BOAT

- Overloading a boat with gear or passengers will make the boat unstable and increase the risk of capsizing or swamping. Abide by the boats capacity plate which located near the boat operators position.

FOLLOW NAVIGATION AND OTHER RULES ON THE WATER

- Never allow passengers to ride on gunwales or seatbacks or outside of protective railings, including the front of a pontoon boat. A sudden turn, stop or start could cause a fall overboard.
- After leaving the boat launch, maintain slow-no-wake speed for a safe and legal distance from the launch.
- Follow boat traffic rules.

TAKE SPECIAL COLD WATER PRECAUTIONS IN SPRING

Cold water temperatures reduce your margin for error on the water: if you fall in or your boat capsizes, you may have as little as two minutes before losing your ability to move your muscles and get back in the boat or seek help.