

Talking points: Early season boating safety reminders

Primary messages:

Cold water kills. Wear your life jacket!

Inflatable life jackets are a convenient and comfortable option for adults.

2014 stats: 14 boating-related deaths statewide; a life jacket was not worn in 13 of those cases.

Taking time to prepare now will help ensure a safer and more enjoyable boating season.

- From ice-out until early summer, lakes and streams are extremely cold. To survive an unexpected fall into cold water, it is imperative that you are already wearing a life jacket.
- New styles of life jackets, such as inflatables, are designed for convenient and comfortable preventive wear. Inflatable life jackets are a Coast Guard-approved option for adult boaters.
- Children younger than 10 years old must wear a life jacket anytime they are aboard a watercraft that is underway (i.e., not tied to a dock or anchored for swimming).
- There must be at least one readily accessible and wearable life jacket on board per person. Watercraft 16 feet or longer must also have at least one throwable floatation device (except for canoes and kayaks).
- HOWEVER, boat and water safety officials strongly recommend that all boaters wear life jackets, no matter their age, especially when on cold water.
- The shock of cold water causes an involuntary gasp reflex, leading to inhalation of water. It takes less than a half-cup of water in the lungs to drown. The shock of sudden entry into the water can also cause cardiac arrest, even for people in good health.
- More than 30 percent of boating fatalities in Minnesota occur in cold water. Life jackets not only keep you afloat, but Type III/foam-filled styles also add some insulation against the effects of cold water.
- Anglers should be mindful of their boat's weight capacity and occupancy limit. Overloading of small fishing boats with people and gear is a common cause of capsizing and swamping.
- In 2014, there were 14 boating fatalities in Minnesota. Of those, 13 were not wearing a life jacket. Boating fatality and accident details are available online at www.mndnr.gov/boatingsafety.

- Taking a few minutes now to ensure your boat has the needed safety equipment and that items are in working order will lead to a safer and more enjoyable boating season.
- In addition to life jackets, safety equipment for motorboats includes: a horn or whistle, fire extinguisher and navigation lights. These may be required depending on size and type of boat, but their use on all motorboats is recommended by the DNR. Details can be found on pages 10-20 of the 2015 Minnesota Boating Guide.
- All watercraft must have a valid boat registration, except for non-motorized watercraft 10 feet or less.
- Youth operators 12-17 are required to have a watercraft operator's permit to operate motorboats over 25 hp (age 13 minimum for personal watercraft under the visual supervision of someone age 21 or older). Details are on pages 25 and 36 of the 2015 Boating Guide.
- Further details on boating safety, required equipment, boat registration and watercraft operator's permits can be found at www.mndnr.gov/boatingsafety.