

Are you prepared for boating season?

By Adam Walton of Pike Pole Fishing Guide Services

As numerous recreational boaters and anglers get ready for another season, boat safety and etiquette can unfortunately be overlooked or taken for granted. The following information discusses important topics to review before venturing out to enjoy Wisconsin's great waters. This includes a review of data collected by agencies involved in tracking boating accidents, review of proper boat handling etiquette and review of waterway marking systems.

The first and most important subject to look at is safety. Recent statistics from the Wisconsin DNR website show that the young generations of boaters are usually the safest and the "seasoned veterans" are most at risk of boating mishaps. The introduction of a mandatory boating safety education class for operators born after Jan. 1, 1989, and who are 16 years old or older, undoubtedly plays a role in this factor. Last year, 60 percent of operators reported that they had not completed a boat safety education class. Also, the site data notes operator experience did not appear to be a contributing factor in 2015 boat accidents. A large percentage of the operators reported more than 500 hours of boating experience.

Last season, 108 boating accidents were reported which resulted in 74 persons injured and 21 fatalities. These accidents involved 154 vessels, in which 91 percent were motorized and 9 percent were non-motorized. However, 52 percent of the 21 fatalities occurred while operating non-motorized vessels such as kayaks and canoes. Property damage totaled \$892,905. In 2015 there were 115 boating accidents reported which resulted in 58 persons injured and 21 fatalities. These accidents involved 163 vessels in which 93 percent were motorized and 6 percent were non-motorized. The reported property damage of all these incidents combined totaled \$675,022. The graph at the bottom of this page shows other boating fatalities from recent past.

Of the above fatalities, lack of wearing a life jacket contributed to many of these deaths. Since it's mandatory for operators to carry life jackets for each person in the boat, these statistics are upsetting, knowing prevention was only a few feet away.

A closer look at Wisconsin boating laws show all vessels (including canoes, kayaks, and paddleboards) are required to have at least one USCG-approved wearable life jacket for each person on board. All wearable life jackets must be readily accessible and everyone on board must be able to put them on in a reasonable amount of time in an emergency. Life jackets cannot be stowed in plastic bags, in locked or closed compartments or have other gear stowed on top of them. In addition, federal law requires children under the age of 13 to wear a USCG-approved life jacket while underway in an open vessel on federally controlled waters. This includes, but is not limited to, the Rock River system, Lake Winnebago system and Great Lakes. All life jackets must be in good and serviceable condition, which means no tears, rips, broken straps or snaps. They also must be the proper size for the intended wearer. Remember, sizing for life jackets is based on body weight and chest size. Even though laws do not require life jackets to be worn by adults in any waters or children in non-federal waters, it is obviously recommended. There are a few special cases to note about life jackets. Every person on board a personal watercraft is required to wear a USCG-approved life jacket. However, sailboards and windsurfers are exempt from life jacket requirements, but are highly encouraged to wear one. Also, all vessels 16 feet or more in length must have one USCG-approved throwable personal flotation device on board that is immediately accessible.

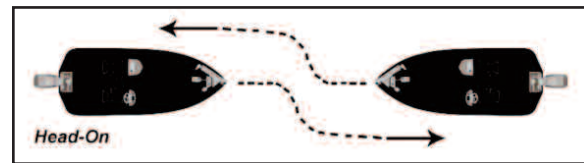
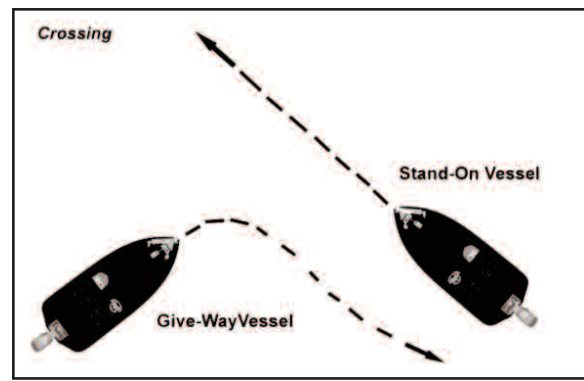
Other required safety equipment includes fire extinguishers, signal devices, and sound devices. Depending on the size and type of a vessel, there are numerous variables regarding safety equipment. It is best for operators to check their state law and the Coast Guard regulations before venturing onto the water.

The second topic to discuss is proper boat handling and etiquette. Everything starts at the landing. Memorial Day weekend is not the time to launch your boat for the first time, nor is it the time to fire up the motor for the first time since 1996. There is often a line at launches, so be considerate by being prepared. While at home or in the launch parking lot, prepare as much as possible on the boat before backing into the water. Once the boat is backed into the water, it should be off the trailer and out of the way in less than a few minutes. A pre-launch checklist may sound silly, but they can help infrequent boaters be more efficient and not hold up the launch line. Each boat is a little different, but a basic boat launching checklist can be found on-

line. When loading the boat, the same rules apply. Just remember: quick, safe and efficient.

Many boaters throw out the rules when they hit the water and assume it's a free-for-all. However, just like driving down the road, there are regulations regarding boat travel. One of the most common problems is understanding which vessel has the "right of way" in a crossing situation. The name says it all really. If both vessels are under power, the vessel approaching from the right is considered the "stand-on" vessel and has the "right of way." The vessel approaching from the left is considered the "give-way" vessel and must change course or stop until the vessel approaching from the right passes by.

Another common situation occurring is meeting a vessel head-on. When this happens, vessels should simply pass port side to port side if possible. Most boaters have heard the terms "port" and "starboard" but struggle to remember which side is which. Assuming



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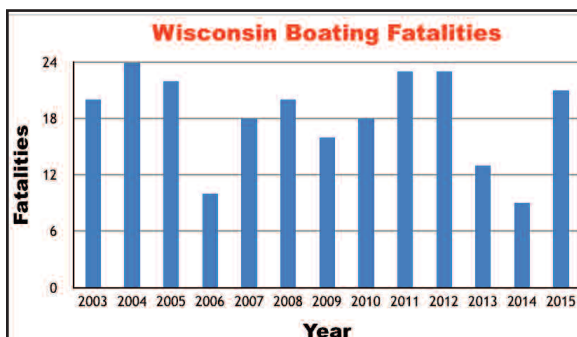
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