



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE CONTACT: Sheriff Joseph Underwood
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DANGER AHEAD:

Sheriff Underwood offers tips to stay safe on the busiest, and often deadliest, weekend of the boating season

Cassopolis -- Cass County Sheriff Joseph M. Underwood, Jr., has issued a boaters' safety advisory for the upcoming holiday. Historically, the Fourth of July weekend is the busiest -- and often the deadliest -- of the boating season. Statistics indicate that as many as 16 percent of all boating fatalities occur during this busy summer holiday.

Sheriff Underwood is concerned that this disturbing trend will continue unless boaters are especially careful, use common sense, and take the steps necessary to avoid tragedy.

The Cass County Sheriff's Office Marine Patrol offers six safety tips:

1. ***Wear a life jacket:*** 70 percent of boating fatalities involve drowning, and of those who drowned, 86 percent were not wearing a life jacket. With a number of colors and styles available, there is no excuse for not wearing a life jacket.
2. ***Make sure your boat is properly equipped and your equipment is in good working order:*** Boaters are urged to carry all the legally required equipment, such as life jackets and fire extinguishers, plus some recommended items, such as a first aid kit, charts of the area (to help you identify your location), and an anchor. Since the holiday is one of the few times when many boaters venture out at night, be sure to check your navigation lights. They should be working properly in order for you to be seen by other boats.
3. ***Avoid Alcohol:*** As much as 50 percent of all boating accidents involve alcohol. Alcohol affects your judgment, balance, and vision - all of which are necessary to operate a boat. Studies have shown that passengers are also 10 times more likely to fall overboard when they have been consuming alcohol. Please, wait until you get home to celebrate with a drink.
4. ***File a Float Plan:*** Similar to a flight plan for a pilot, a float plan gives the "who, what, when, and where" of your trip. A float plan should be filed with a friend or family member on shore and should contain clear instructions for the holder to contact the Sheriff or Coast Guard in the event that you don't return from your voyage when you are expected.
5. ***Maintain a sharp lookout:*** More boats will be on the water this weekend than any other time of the year so everyone needs to be on the alert for other boaters in order to avoid a collision. This is especially true when operating near a bend, in crowded waterways, and at night or during conditions of restricted visibility.

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6. ***Carry a marine radio or cell phone:*** Be prepared to call for help in the event that you are involved in an accident, your boat becomes disabled, or you otherwise need assistance. The VHF-FM radio is the preferred method for contacting the Coast Guard because they can use direction finding equipment to locate you. Other boaters with marine radios can also hear your call for help. While cell phones are also acceptable, make sure you have a full battery before heading out on the water. But, beware - there are often gaps in cell phone coverage on the water.

In short, boaters should be prepared! By following these simple tips, boaters should be able to enjoy a long relaxing weekend on the water!

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