

OTHER VIEWS

Know rules on water before you shove off

Whether you're fishing, swimming, skiing or floating down a lazy river this summer, most of you will take advantage of one of our greatest state resources: water.

Every summer, lines of vehicles towing boats travel our highways, each heading to a favorite water destination. Wisconsin has more than 15,000 inland lakes, 43,000 miles of rivers, and 650 miles of Great Lakes shoreline. With all this available surface water, it is not surprising that recreational boating is a major part of Wisconsin outdoor recreational activities, as well as a significant part of the state's economy and tourism industry.

The 11th Senate District has more than 100 lakes—and 77 of them are in Waukesha County alone. Walworth County has 24 lakes, the largest being Geneva Lake, which is 9 miles long and anywhere from 1 to 3 miles wide. Our many lakes are one of the reasons why Waukesha and Walworth counties are ranked fourth and sixth in tourism dollars brought into the state. In fact, without the state and local government revenues generated by tourism, taxing Wisconsin households would face nearly \$950 in additional taxes annually to maintain existing government services. (The Economic Impact of Expenditures by Travelers on Wisconsin 2006 by Davidson-Peterson & Assoc.)

Boating might be one of the more popular summer pastimes, but without caution, it can also be one of the most dangerous. In 2006, there were 10 boating fatalities in Wisconsin, down from 22 in 2005. The decrease could be due to boaters' awareness and attention to safety. Many of these fatalities were due to drowning, so be sure to wear a life jacket or

at least provide one personal flotation device for each passenger on board.

Senate Bill 16 would require boaters ages 12 years and younger to wear personal flotation devices while aboard any boat 26 feet long or shorter and while the boat is in operation. SB 16 passed the Senate and is available to be scheduled in the Assembly in the near future.

Some of the most common boating infractions include personal watercraft violations, failure to provide the proper number of personal flotation devices, operating a boat without a valid certificate number, operating a boat in a prohibited area or in excess of speed, operating a motorboat while under the influence of an intoxicant, operating a boat at night without required lights and allowing an underage person to operate a motorboat.

A new Wisconsin law passed last year requires boating education. The law requires anyone born on or after Jan. 1, 1989, and at least 16 years of age to have a boating safety education certificate to operate a motorboat on Wisconsin's waterways.

Receiving a citation for a boating violation can quickly turn a day of fun in the sun, to a day of no fun at all. So be sure to know Wisconsin's boating laws. Review the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Web page at www.dnr.state.wi.us to ensure you are up-to-date on boating regulations. You may also call the southeast regional boating office with questions at (414) 263-8500.

Have fun while boating around a Wisconsin lake or river this summer, but remember to put safety first. Please use common sense, and have a great summer!

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