

## **BOATING, WATER SAFETY**

State natural resources officials urge boating and water safety

Obeying boating laws and rules should keep most boaters safe and out of trouble:

State law requires boating safety training for anyone younger than 16 who wants to operate a boat or personal watercraft with an engine 15-horsepower or greater without being accompanied by an adult. For questions concerning this requirement or boater education courses contact, DNR's Boating Education offices at 1-800-277-4301, (803) 734-3995 in Columbia or (803) 762-5041 in Charleston.

Any person younger than 12 in a boat less than 16 feet long must wear a personal flotation device. Anyone on a personal watercraft, which includes Jet Skis, Sea-Doos, WaveRunners and others, must wear a Coast Guard-approved flotation device; they cannot be operated after sunset or before sunrise; and they must be equipped with self-circling or lanyard-type engine cutoffs. No vessel may operate in excess of idle speed within 50 feet of an anchored vessel, dock, pier or person in the water, or within 100 yards of the Atlantic Ocean coastline. No one may jump the wake of another vessel within 200 feet of the vessel creating the wake.

When towing a water skier or person on a floating device, a boat must have an observer on board or the vessel must be equipped with wide-angled mirrors. A sound-producing device, such as a horn or whistle, is required on all boats. Fire extinguishers are required on most boats.

It is against the law, and extremely dangerous, to operate a boat while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. In South Carolina, individuals involved in an accident which causes a death or serious injury faces an implied consent alcohol test and serious penalties with a maximum of 10 years imprisonment and \$25,000 fine. On the water, the effects of alcohol or drugs are magnified by the elements of sun, wind and wave action. Alcohol also impairs coordination of arm and leg movements, slows response to emergency situations and makes it difficult for boat operators to scan the horizon.

Boat operators are also reminded that wearable personal flotation devices (PFDs or life jackets) are required for each person onboard. On boats 16 feet and longer throwable devices, such as flotation cushions, are required in addition to wearable devices. Life jackets must properly fit each individual, whether child or adult, and be serviceable without tears, holes or other damage or wear that would decrease the effectiveness of the device. More than 90 percent of all boating fatalities could be prevented with the proper use of life jackets.

Boating accidents resulting in the loss of life, loss of consciousness, personal injury requiring medical treatment or property damage in excess of \$500 must be reported to the Department of Natural Resources. Failure to report an accident can result in a maximum fine of \$100 for each violation.

Report boating accidents or emergencies to the DNR toll-free, 24-hour hotline at 1-800-922-5431. This number can also be used to report boating violations such as reckless operation or an intoxicated boat operator.

For a copy of South Carolina's Boating Regulations or to find out about local boating safety courses contact the DNR Boating Safety Office at 1-800-277-4301; (843) 762-5041 in Charleston or (803) 734-3995 in Columbia, or visit the DNR Web site at <http://www.dnr.state.sc.us/etc/boating.html>.