

MARK YOUR CALENDARS: MAY 18–24, 2024

Get Ready for National Safe Boating Week

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It's not hard to become complacent about safe boating. The weather is getting good, you may be anxious to try out some new boating toys, and you feel like you've been working hard and deserve some "me" time on the lake. I hear you, however, I'd like you, your loved ones, and other people on the lake to be safe, so slow down and take a few minutes to think about how important it is to practice safe boating.

The National Safe Boating Council promotes safe boating each year with its annual "National Safe Boating Week"—this year it is May 18–24.

The following statistics from the National Safe Boating Council may shock you:

- 75% of boating deaths are due to drowning
- 75% of deaths occurred on boats where the operator had no boating safety instruction
- 85% of drowning victims were not wearing a life jacket
- 66% of drowning victims are good swimmers
- The top five primary contributing factors in accidents are operator inattention, operator inexperience, improper lookout, excessive speed and machinery failure.
- 100% of accidents and fatalities from boating under the influence are preventable.

A safe boater is responsible. He or she wears a life jacket, attaches a safety lanyard, keeps a proper lookout, maintains three points of contact with the boat (two hands holding on while being seated, two feet and a hand holding on when moving about the boat to maintain balance and to avoid injury to himself/herself or someone else), doesn't boat under the influence, checks the weather before launch, and while on the water, doesn't run out of



gas by following the rule of thirds (1/3 of fuel to be used outbound, 1/3 inbound, and 1/3 as a reserve), and knows how to navigate the lake. I have found that gas gages are notoriously inaccurate so monitor what you put in your tank!

Before heading out on the water for a day of boating or other water sport activity, review the following checklist to ensure a fun and safe adventure:

- **Prepare your gear.** Before leaving the dock, make sure you and your guests have the safety equipment required for the day ahead.
- **Check the forecast.** The weather can change quickly, so it's important to look at the forecast, not to just look at the current state of the weather.
- **File a float plan** (a written statement including a description of your boat, who is on board, a list of safety equipment you're carrying, where you expect to be, and when you expect to return). Leave your float plan with a friend, family member, or even a dock master at your marina.
- **Complete a passenger briefing.** Acquaint your passengers with the location of safety information and equipment on board, including life jackets. Ensure a properly fitted life jacket is worn by each passenger.
- **Check your lines.** Inspect the dock lines to make sure they're in good condition. Carry two or three extra dock lines and have at least one anchor set up and attached to your anchor line.
- **Have a safety plan for re-boarding your vessel.** What's your plan for bad weather or other emergencies? Be sure to have either a swim ladder, platform, or lifting harness on board.



The importance of wearing and packing the right gear (life jackets and emergency communications) cannot be overstressed. To wear your life jacket like a pro:

- Ensure it is U.S. Coast Guard approved.
- Wear the life jacket approved for the boating activity or water sport. The label will indicate the life jacket's accredited use by craft, sport, and/or age.
- If wearing an inflatable life jacket, read and follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Be honest about your swimming ability. If you are a poor swimmer, you may opt for a higher performance level life jacket to ensure you can tread water and deep upright if needed during an emergency.
- Always check for proper fit of the life jacket. Pull up on straps to check for a snug and comfortable fit.
- Inspect the life jacket to ensure it's in good working order. Make sure it's not ripped, torn, or defective in any way.

Emergency communication devices are your first line of defense in an emergency to alert authorities when you are in need. The devices that can be installed on your boat include a VHF radio, an Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB), and a satellite phone. Or you can wear a device on your person, such as a Personal Locator Beacon (PLB). Cell phones should not be considered emergency communication devices because cell service is not reliable.

Know how to use your VHF Radio. Monitor Channel 16 for emergency traffic and weather alerts. If your VHF radio has Digital Selective Calling, be sure it has a registered MMSI number and is properly connected to your boat's GPS.

Visual and sound distress signaling devices can aid in the search and rescue efforts of local authorities or Good Samaritans by pinpointing your location visually. These aids include:

- Flares
- Personal locator beacons
- Electronic distress lights

DIFFERENT TYPES OF PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICES (PFD)



- Flags
- Whistles
- Signaling mirrors

Carrying at least one of these items on your person in the event of a sudden fall overboard or if you get disconnected from your craft can save your life. Check your state marine law enforcement rules to ensure you meet the requirement of required safety equipment for your craft.

The National Safe Boating Council's website (safeboatingcouncil.org) offers a wealth of information. Recreational boating and water activities are enjoyed by millions of Americans each year. Don't be a statistic! With the tips in this article, I hope your time on the water will be more enjoyable. A safe day on the water is a perfect day on the water whether you are a novice boater, paddler, or powerboater.

For information about America's Boating Club® – Golden Corner Lakes membership, boating safety classes and activities, visit their website (gclsaps.com)—your local boating club for Lakes Keowee, Hartwell, and Jocassee. ❀