

Boating, Swimming Responsibly Key to Summer Safety

07/23/14

Shawn Miller, NDW Public Affairs

WASHINGTON – As the "101 Critical Days of Summer" reaches past the halfway point of the season, boating and water safety remain key to responsibly enjoying vacations and recreation before September rolls around.

Whether on a boat or personal watercraft, or swimming at a beach or in a pool, safety experts urge everyone to use common sense as a baseline.

Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling (JBAB) Safety Specialist Dean McKinsey highlighted alcohol use as one of the main factors leading to injuries and fatalities.



Boaters prepare for a day on the water at Point Patience Marina aboard Naval Recreation Center (NRC) Solomons, June 30. Boating and swimming carefully play a key role in personal safety during the "101 Critical Days of Summer," running through Labor Day. (Photo by Shawn Miller)

"Balance is one of the first things you lose when you consume alcohol, and when you combine this with the rocking of a boat, the chance of falling overboard increases," McKinsey noted in a safety presentation he provides to personnel at JBAB.

Alcohol consumption is particularly dangerous when combined with outdoor activities in the summer sun because perspiration removes water from the body while leaving the alcohol in, which can lead to quicker impairment and dehydration.

Wayne Walker, a safety specialist at Naval Air Station (NAS) Patuxent River, compared alcohol consumption on the water to drinking and driving.

"You don't drink and drive a boat, either; and life jackets are like seat belts," Walker said. "When you're underway, wear your life jacket."

Beyond refraining from mixing alcohol and boating, the U.S. Coast Guard's Boating Safety Resource Center (BSRC) offers a number of tips for enjoying a day on the rivers, lakes, or ocean without mishap.

According to the BSRC website, 70 percent of all boating incidents are caused by operator error. The BSRC offers a number of boating safety courses for users to study before going afloat. Before setting off, all boaters are encouraged to file float plans to properly prepare for emergencies, whether in a small canoe or large yacht.

For more information on resources or to download and print a float plan, visit www.uscgboating.org.

"Safe boating starts before your first trip out on the water," McKinsey stated in his safety presentation. "Do not wait until an accident happens to educate yourself as well as your family on the rules and responsibilities of safe boating."

Walker advised boaters to always keep an eye on the weather, both before and during a trip. He advised using radar applications, whether by larger equipment on vessels or on a phone or tablet for individuals.

"In this part of the country, a storm can come up the river and get you in a minute," Walker added.

Besides personal safety, boaters and personal watercraft users are also urged to look out for the safety of wildlife and the environment in the diverse ecosystems of local waterways by using caution along shores and shallow sections where wakes from watercraft may cause erosion and damage to vegetation and natural habitats.

For those who prefer a dip in the pool or at the beach, the Navy Safety Center offers guidance for swimmers. When accompanying children, parents or guardians are advised to always have a designated watcher or lifeguard who knows CPR and has emergency supplies readily available.

For personal pools, ensure that proper fencing, gates and drain guards are installed, and remove portable ladders when not in use. When on a trip to the beach, the National Weather Service encourages vacationers to plan for local weather and surf forecasts, as well as being aware of beach hazards such as rip currents. For more information, visit www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov.

For more safety news, tips and links to resources, visit www.safetycenter.navy.mil.