

Coast Guard Auxiliary promotes National Safe Boating Week

National Safe Boating Week begins May 22 and ends May 28, promoting safe and responsible recreational boating as the summer season approaches.

Each year the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary partners with the National Safe Boating Council and other organizations during National Safe Boating Week and throughout the year, to save lives and property by educating recreational boaters.

Boaters can take these simple steps to make their boating experience safer:

1. Always wear your life jacket. About 90 percent of all recreational boating drowning victims were not wearing a life jacket. Life jackets are available in a wide variety of compact, lightweight and attractive styles suitable for constant wear.

2. Avoid mixing alcohol and boating. Approximately one fifth of all

recreational boating fatalities in 2009 involved alcohol. Alcohol affects vision, coordination, balance and judgment. Alcohol will impair your ability to safely operate your boat even more than it impairs your abil-

ity to drive a car.

3. Check your flares, fire extinguisher and other safety equipment to be certain it is in good condition and up-to-date. The Coast Guard Auxiliary offers free ves-

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sel safety checks that can help identify these or any other potential programs. No fines or penalties – just good advice. Ask for a vessel safety check at: www.cgaux7.org

4. Take a boating safety course. Know the boating regulations for South Carolina. The Coast Guard Auxiliary offers South Carolina DNR certified boating courses which qualify for the SC DNR Boaters Education Card. To find a local boating course in your area go to: www.cgaux7.org or www.dnr.sc.gov/boating/

5. Adjust your speed in limited visibility, particularly at night. You and your passengers should be watchful for other boats and hazards in the water.

6. Tell a friend, family member or marina harbor master where you are going and file a "float plan". If you change plans, let them know.

7. Check the weather. Tune your VHF marine radio to WX (channel 1, 2, or 3) or log onto the National Weather Service website at: www.nws.noaa.gov

8. Shut off your engines when approaching swimmers or divers. In South Carolina, it is illegal to operate a vessel within 50 feet of a diver-down flag.

9. Pay special attention to the effects of the sun and heat. Drink plenty of water to keep hydrated, and lessen your exposure by wearing sunglasses and sunscreen.

According to Lt. Robert McCullough, SC DNR Law Enforcement spokesperson, there were 2 separate boating accidents on Lake Murray on May 1, resulting in 4 fatalities.

South Carolina has had

12 recreational boating fatalities so far this year, compared with 11 boating fatalities for all of 2009.

Promoting recreational boating safety is the primary mission of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. Auxiliarists are not law enforcement officers or military, but are the uniformed volunteer component of the U.S. Coast Guard. Auxiliarists assist the Coast Guard in most of its missions, including marine safety patrols and Search and Rescue missions.