



Wear A Life Jacket, Boat Responsibly On Wisconsin Waters

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) anticipates an increase in boating, paddling, fishing and other watersport activities heading into the holiday weekend.

Life Jackets Save Lives

In 2024, there were 14 boating fatalities, 10 of which involved a victim who was not wearing a life jacket. Operator inexperience, inattention, recklessness and speeding are the four leading causes of tragic watercraft crashes, with the leading cause of death being drowning.

The department does not track all drownings – only those fatalities linked to the use of a recreational activity item, such as a boat, kayak or canoe. The DNR's [Boating Incident Report webpage](#) contains information on all fatality reports.

Statistics show boaters who wear life jackets and take boater safety courses are most likely to stay safe on Wisconsin waters.

Know Before You Go

The [Handbook of Wisconsin Boating Laws and Responsibilities](#) outlines when, where and who can operate boats and personal watercraft. Before hitting the water, brush up on all applicable laws to ensure the safe and legal operation of boats and watercraft.

Learn more about registering your boat, taking a safety class, reporting an incident and more on the DNR's [Boating in Wisconsin webpage](#).

Boating Safety Reminders

Follow the safety tips below and enjoy Wisconsin's many great lakes and rivers with family and friends.

- [Sign up now to take an online boater education course.](#)
- Always wear a properly fitted and fastened life jacket when on or near the water. A life jacket will keep you on top of the water if you walk off an unexpected drop-off, a wave or current overpowers you or you fall out of a boat.
- Enjoy the waters sober and know your limits. Alcohol blurs a person's judgment, reaction time and abilities.
- River shorelines and sandbars pose unseen dangers. Higher, fast-moving water can tax an individual's boating, paddling and swimming skills.
- Keep an eye on the weather and always tell someone where you are going.
- Create a float plan and tell people when and where you plan to depart and return before going for a float or paddle.

Be ready for the unexpected and always wear your life jacket. Learn more about watersport safety on the DNR's [Boat Safety webpage](#).