Stay safe on the water this summer

Posted by Joy Shrum-Reporter On 05/02/2018

Hollywood, MD- It seems like we went from winter to summer, with above average temperatures baking the region this week. The hot weather is likely to entice you to head out on the water to enjoy the warm temperatures and sunshine. Before you set sail, make sure you’re prepared to be safe on the water.

The U.S. Coast Guard Station at St. Inigoes typically responds to 50 to 100 search and rescue calls a year. In addition, they conduct about 400 boardings to make sure boaters and their passengers are following safety rules. During each boarding, the Coast Guard checks for registrations, the capacity of the boat, the safety equipment and makes sure the driver isn’t under the influence. One rule that tends to be broken often is riding on the bow of a boat.

If you’re boating with little ones, there are several safety measures to keep in mind. Children under the age of four are required by law to wear a life jacket that includes a safety strap that goes between their legs. While adults tend to be a little more reluctant to wear life jackets, the Coast Guard says it’s important to make sure you have properly fitting life jackets for everyone onboard.

If you’re hitting the waves on personal watercraft, like jet skis, life jackets are a must. A majority of the fatalities on the water happen because the victim is not wearing a life jacket.

Another piece of safety equipment that could make a life or death difference is a radio. Cell phones aren’t as reliable with spotty service or dead batteries, so it’s important to have a working VHF radio handy. If you have to make a radio call for help, it’s also likely another boater will hear it and be able to respond quickly to your location.

Any time you head out on the water, make sure you file a float plan. Let someone know where you’re going, when you’re going to be there and how long you’re going to be out. And always, make sure your equipment is in good working order.

The Coast Guard also suggests that you always check the weather before getting underway.

Boating safety courses are also highly recommended by the Coast Guard, especially those who use jet skis because they have a higher level of risk. If you’d like to sign up for a boater course, contact the Coast Guard.

If you’re planning to be on the water often, it’s also recommended you purchase an EPIRB—or emergency position indicating radio beacon. It’s used to alert search and rescue services in the event of an emergency.

If you’re out on the water in a non-powered watercraft like a kayak or canoe, there are other steps you need to take to remain safe. Be aware of your surroundings and if you’re operating in a heavy traffic area, be aware of what’s around you. Also, try to stay as visual as you can and also have a handheld radio with you.

The Coast Guard has a free app that includes plenty of safety information. The app is available for both Android and Apple devices.

Be safe on the water this summer!

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