

OPP encourages boaters to exercise caution during Safe Boating Awareness Week

By Sam Odrowski

The Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) is encouraging people within the province to be cautious, prepared and mindful when boating to prevent avoidable tragedies.

Safe Boating Awareness Week runs from May 17-23 this year, led by the Canadian Safe Boating Council, with a focus on taking actions to limit or prevent injuries and death in Ontario's waterways.

Among the 131 people who lost their lives due to boating incidents in OPP-patrolled waterways in the last five years, 56 were paddlers. Between 2020-2024, 34 of those who died in marine incidents were canoeists, 17 were kayakers and five were using stand-up paddleboards.

Whether you and your family are in motorized or human-propelled vessels, be mindful that falling overboard as well as capsized vessels remain the leading causes of OPP-investigated boating and paddling deaths year after year, said Central Region OPP in a press release.

The data makes a compelling case for the value in wearing a lifejacket. It is virtually impossible to drown if you are floating in the water with a properly fitted lifejacket. Even if you are rendered unconscious in a paddling/boating incident, a lifejacket will keep your head above water and keep you breathing. This is a particularly important message for paddlers/boaters who cannot swim, as a lifejacket is the one piece of equipment that you can count on to save your life.

Alcohol or drug impairment, hazardous waterways and operator inexperience are among the top contributing factors in marine deaths, according to the OPP.

OPP marine officers have been out on the water promoting marine safety and enforcing boating laws for the duration of Safe Boating Awareness Week, which concludes tomorrow, Friday, May 23.

For a safe and enjoyable boating season, always be well-prepared. Familiarize yourself with Canada's Safe Boating Guide (https://tc.canada.ca/sites/default/files/2024-03/tp_511e.pdf). Ensure your vessel is properly functioning and equipped. Check the weather forecast to determine if it is safe to go out and always boat sober and drug-free, said Central Region OPP's press release.

Finally, remember the only lifejacket that can save your life is the one you are wearing.