

OPP reports boating fatalities in Ontario have reach 10-year low

Boating incidents investigated by OPP have revealed a 10-year low in fatalities, but not wearing a personal floatation device (PFD) or lifejacket continues to be a contributing factor in the overwhelming majority of the deaths each year.

OPP partnered with the Canadian Safe Boating Council and other marine safety partners to take part in Safe Boating Week earlier this month. Heading into the campaign, police were sharing facts about boating fatalities in Ontario and asking boaters to do their part to stay safe this boating season.

Last year (2014), 20 people died in boating incidents (on OPP-patrolled waterways) which is the lowest number of marine fatalities they has seen in the last 10 years.

While police are pleased to see this general downward trend, it is issuing an important reminder that wearing a lifejacket or PFD significantly increases survivability, should a mishap occur. Not wearing this equipment continues to be a contributing factor in the overwhelming majority of boating fatalities from year to year, on OPP-patrolled waterways.

Over the last five years, there were 20 boating deaths in 2014, and 17 of them attributed to not wearing a PFD or lifejacket; there were 23 fatalities in 2013, and 20 of them involved not wearing a PFD or lifejacket; 22 deaths in 2012, with 18 of them involving not using a PFD; 22 deaths in 2011 and in 19 of tyhose incidents the victims were not using a PFD; and 28 fatalities in 2010, with 22 of the not using a PFD.

While the warmer weather is here, the water is still chilly. Police are reminding boaters that most lakes and rivers, especially those in Northern Ontario, are still very cold and the threat of cold water immersion makes this a particularly important time to be prepared and wear that PFD or lifejacket.

There are four phases of cold water immersion (hypothermia is one of them) and each of the four phases pose unique physiological challenges for one when they find themselves in cold water as a result of a boating incident.

When a person first enters very cold water, they experience an automatic gasp reflex and if their head is underwater, water may be breathed into the lungs. This is one way drowning occurs. Wearing a PFD or lifejacket keeps one's head above water during this critical moment and can save their life.

Motorized boats are not the only culprits in boating deaths.

Last year (2014), five paddling crafts (four canoes and one kayak) were involved in boating fatality incidents investigated by OPP. While they are increasing in popularity and are a great way to experience the waterways, people shouldn't leave their safety on shore ? a paddle PFD is your best accessory!

Boat passengers and the public play a role in keeping it a safe and enjoyable boating season

If you are a passenger being invited for a boat ride, take responsibility for your own safety and insist on wearing a PFD or lifejacket.

If the driver of the boat does not have one on board for you, do not go out.

If you suspect that a boater is operating their vessel while impaired, call 9-1-1 to make a report. By taking charge of your own safety and taking action against boaters who place you and others in a potentially dangerous situation, you could be averting a tragedy on the water.

OPP is counting on everyone being on board with making it a safe boating season in Ontario.