

RESPONSIBLE PARENTS ARE PREPARED PARENTS

"YOU'RE IN COMMAND" - HELP PREVENT CHILDHOOD DROWNINGS

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YOU'RE IN COMMAND

BOAT RESPONSIBLY

There is nothing more devastating to family and friends than the death of a child – especially when that death possibly could have been prevented.

You may already know that motor vehicle accidents represent the leading cause of unintentional deaths among children ages 1 to 14; but, do you know what is the second leading cause? Drowning. According to the National SAFE KIDS Campaign, more than 900 children drown accidentally every year.

The SAFE KIDS campaign reminds us that drowning can happen in as little as one inch of water. It is usually quick and silent. They further state that a child will lose consciousness two minutes after submersion, with irreversible brain damage occurring within four to six minutes. While most drownings of children happen in bathtubs, swimming pools, and ponds, too many drownings occur as a result of children not wearing life jackets on recreational boats.

In fact, according to our (Coast Guard) own statistics, between 1999 and 2003, 160 children, under the age of 13, died while boating. 84 of them drowned.

National SAFE KIDS Week is April 30-May 7. There's no better time to remember, that as either a boat owner or operator and parent, you are responsible for the safety of yourself, your passengers and other boaters – especially your children.

Most of the time children are perfectly safe on boats if supervised. They take to boating so naturally, and have so much fun, that we adults can forget the potential dangers. Too many of us believe that we can easily jump into the water to rescue them if they slip overboard. We also feel that if we "keep an eye" on them, they'll be alright. These are dangerous misconceptions. We need to be constantly thinking of the potential risks and taking responsible actions to minimize them.

Children can slip under the lifeline or rail of most boats in seconds. Since they do not weigh much, their little wet feet can lose grip on the deck with the slightest unexpected motion; yet another reason why wearing proper shoes while boating can minimize the possible risk of slipping and falling overboard. A child falling overboard may not surface immediately, and may fall yards behind a boat moving at even moderate speed. It can be very difficult to spot a tiny head among even moderate waves.

Responsible parents will insist that their children always wear a properly fitting, Coast Guard Approved life jacket on the water. In fact, laws in most states and the Coast Guard's "PFD-13 and under rule" make life jackets mandatory for children under age 13. Life jackets must be

Coast Guard-approved, in good condition, and sized to fit properly; adult life jackets will not work for children.

But even parents who outfit their children with life jackets may fail to wear jackets themselves. This can be a dangerous and tragic mistake. Adults, like children, can be unexpectedly thrown from boats. Adults can be injured in an accident and be unable to keep themselves afloat without assistance, much less come to the rescue of a child, or be able to sustain themselves on the surface of the water while attempting to hold on to their struggling child.

Perhaps the most important reason for adults to wear life jackets at all times while on the water, is that parents and caregivers have the ability to instill a lifetime of safe behavior in a child. As role models, adults are a strong influence – especially on younger children.

That's why the theme of this year's National SAFE KIDS Week is "Follow the Leader. Safety Starts with You." This sounds a lot like the theme of the Coast Guard's national outreach initiative, "You're in Command. Boat Responsibly!"

So, please take your children boating. Introduce them to an activity they can enjoy for a lifetime. Help prevent the tragedy of child drownings. Ensure that when children are on the water enjoying a day of boating, that they are wearing U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets that fit properly – and make sure you are wearing one too!

The National SAFE KIDS Campaign is the first and only national nonprofit organization dedicated solely to the prevention of unintentional childhood injury – the number one killer of children ages 14 and under. More than 300 state and local SAFE KIDS coalitions in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico comprise the campaign.

For more information, go to: www.safekids.org.

The Coast Guard's national outreach initiative asks boaters to take full responsibility for the safety of themselves and their passengers. The Coast Guard's message to boaters is "You're in Command. Boat Responsibly!" This means always wearing a lifejacket and requiring your passengers to do the same, never boat under the influence of alcohol or drugs, take a safe boating course, and get a free vessel safety check from your local U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary or United States Power Squadron. Boaters who are in command and responsible for their vessel's safe operation are crucial to reducing the number of boating accidents and fatalities.

For more information on boating responsibly, go to:

www.USCGboating.org

www.VesselSafetyCheck.org

U.S. Coast Guard Infoline, 1-800-368-5647 