



United States Army Corps of Engineers  
Wilmington District  
P.O. Box 1890  
Wilmington, North Carolina 28402-1890

# News Release

Contact: PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE  
Phone: (910) 251-4626

---

Aug. 25, 2000

No. 08-24-00

For Release: IMMEDIATELY

## Corps redoubles efforts to ensure lakes have safe Labor Day

WILMINGTON, North Carolina, August 25—"Visiting our lakes is a joyful family experience for literally millions of people each year," said COL Jim DeLony, Commander of the Wilmington District, US Army Corps of Engineers. "Sadly, for a few, visits end in the tragedy of drowning. That's why we are placing extra emphasis on safety now, when people are visiting our recreation areas in greater numbers."

Corps flood control projects within the Wilmington District have seen several heartbreaking incidents this summer, including the deaths of several young children. W. Kerr Scott Lake, near Wilkesboro, has had one drowning, of a 17-year-old boy. B. Everett Jordan Lake and Falls Lake in the Research Triangle Area have experienced four drownings, including the death of a three year old child, and a four-year old boy who fell into the water from a dock at a boat ramp. John H. Kerr Lake, straddling the North Carolina-Virginia state line, saw the drowning of two young brothers who fell from a dock while riding bikes, the death of a 15-year-old boy swimming with friends, and a 53-year old man. Only Philpott Lake, near Bassett, Virginia, has been free of drowning incidents so far this year.

"We cannot be physically present every second with every member of the public," DeLony said, "but we want our messages of safety awareness to be constantly present – and heeded – by all who use our lakes, every minute you're **near water!** The truth is, many people who drown never intended to go into the water. Like those precious little boys, they just fall in, and can't get out safely."

"Our Operations Managers at the Projects live safety day and night. They each have thoughts they'd like the recreating public to be aware of as we move into the holiday weekend," DeLony said.

"**Watch your babies,**" said Joe Tanner, Operations Manager at John H. Kerr Lake. "A moment with your back turned can turn into a lifetime's pain. We all know those moments are a normal, natural part of every busy parent's life. So safeguard your children with a Life Jacket whenever they are NEAR water."

"**Water and alcohol don't mix!**" said Steve Brown, Operations Manager for Falls and Jordan Lakes. "Many adults and young people who drown have had a beer or two. It's enough to make a misstep or an error in judgement fatal, or to turn a confusing moment into desperation. We encourage folks to keep our recreation areas at Falls and Jordan alcohol-free. We hope everyone will stay sober and be safe!"

*“Monitor water and weather conditions carefully,”* said Carl Smith, Operations Manager for Philpott Lake. “Right now Philpott is experiencing lower than normal water levels. That puts rocks and fallen trees and other obstacles much nearer to the surface. Swimmers and boaters can be hurt or killed by hidden hazards. It’s also wise to watch weather and get off the lake and out of the water at the first sign of an electrical storm.”

*“Use ALL your safety equipment,”* said Andy Duncan, of W. Kerr Scott Lake. “Wearing a Life Jacket is our personal favorite lifesaving measure here at Scott. We also strongly encourage mountain bikers and others to wear their helmets, and ask that boaters use all lights and safety equipment. Darkness is a hazard all by itself!”

Other water safety programs available from the Corps include:

**Life Jacket Loaner Program:** Life Jackets DO save lives! Whether you or the children in your care are fishing from a dock or in a boat, or just playing near water, you are vulnerable. “Even strong swimmers can be knocked on the head and unable to swim,” DeLony said. “Our Rangers and volunteer organizations in our lake communities are doing a tremendous job making Life Jackets available at our boat ramps and swim beaches or from gate attendants for use by children and adults. Bring your own well-fitting Life Jacket, or borrow one of ours for the day!”

**Safety materials for the whole family:** Each Corps Lake in the Wilmington District has a professionally-staffed Visitor Assistance Center, where you can talk with a Corps representative, receive safety information for boaters and get fun-to-use teaching materials for children. The Visitor Assistance Centers also feature wildlife exhibits, historical exhibits, and information about the Corps dams and water resources management missions carried on at each lake.

**Ranger presence intensified:** Corps of Engineer Rangers offer safety training throughout the year at area schools and other organizations. During the summer recreation season, and especially on high-use holiday weekends, extra Rangers are on site to offer assistance, ensure boating safety, and provide security and information. Rangers have rescue devices in their vehicles, and are available to help you check out your boat to ensure its safety on the water. The Coast Guard Auxiliary also helps with courtesy marine inspections for the boating public.