



**US Army Corps
of Engineers**
Wilmington District

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Corps redoubles efforts to ensure lakes have safe Labor Day

WILMINGTON, North Carolina, August 29—“Visiting our lakes is a joyful family experience for literally millions of people each year,” said COL Ray Alexander, 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. Most recently, a 16-year-old swimmer drowned in 14 feet of water at Joh H. Kerr Lake, when he became exhausted and could not go the distance he had planned to swim. Two swimmers drowned there earlier this summer – a young girl who became distressed in the water and the young man who tried to help her. Swimmers whose boat got away from them on a nighttime trip lost a friend in the darkness. A boater who was not wearing his life jacket died when he fell into the water from his newly-purchased bass boat.

“We cannot be physically present every second with every member of the public,” Alexander 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!** All of those who drowned this year were outside of designated swim beach areas. Lack of life jackets was a factor for nonswimmers. Alcohol consumption may have played a part in at least one death. We hope everyone will be on guard against risky actions that can result in tragedy!”

“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,” Alexander said.

“Watch your babies,” said Dianne Batson, 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 take advantage of our Life Jacket Loaner Programs and 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 for low water hazards and weather conditions carefully,” said Carl Smith, Operations Manager for Philpott Lake. “Right now ALL our lakes are experiencing lower than normal water levels. That puts rocks and fallen trees and other obstacles much nearer to the surface. Go Slow, before you speed up to test water conditions. Use a DEPTHFINDER to discover any New Hazards that may now lurk just under the surface... especially in areas that you think you know. And of course WEAR YOUR LIFEJACKET. 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 R. G. Absher, 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,” Col. Alexander 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.

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