



United States Army Corps of Engineers
Wilmington District
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News Release

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June 27, 2002

For Release: IMMEDIATELY

Corps officials urge folks to be safe for Independence Day

WILMINGTON, North Carolina, June 27—"A trip to the lake on the 4th of July is traditional for millions of families," said Jim Butler, Director of Operations for the Wilmington District, US Army Corps of Engineers. "This year, we want every single person who visits one of our five lakes to have a Glorious Fourth and to survive for a glorious *fifth* of July too."

Drownings and other water-related accidents have already claimed three lives and caused one serious injury on our lakes this year. One man drowned when he fell from his brand new bass boat. He wasn't wearing a life jacket. Another lost his life when he tried to retrieve a boat that drifted away. The incident occurred at night, and his companions, who were intoxicated, couldn't find him in time. This week, another young man swimming with his girlfriend drowned at Jordan Lake. A fourth man suffered serious leg injuries when a speeding boater overran his jet-ski, then left the scene.

"These incidents highlight the sad fact that many deaths and injuries are avoidable. Wearing a life jacket, avoiding the combination of water sports and alcohol, and driving courteously and safely on our waters might well have prevented these tragic losses," Butler emphasized.

"Our project Operations Managers and our Rangers are working as hard as they can to make safe recreation available for the public. We need the help of every person who visits us to make their efforts effective," Butler said. "Here are a few things they ask you to do, so that you and your family can go home happy from the holiday celebration."

"Watch your babies," said Carl Smith, Operations Manager at Philpott Lake. "Children who are drowning don't splash around noisily and call for help. They slip underwater silently. If your children aren't strong swimmers, put them in well-fitting lifejackets. Put them in lifejackets even if they are only going to be NEAR water. If you don't have a life jacket, please borrow one from our LifeJacket Loan Program. We want to help! Please let us!"

"Launch and go carefully in this low-water season," said Steve Brown, Operations Manager for Falls and Jordan Lakes. "Our boat ramps have been exposed by falling lake levels and some areas are very slick with vegetation. Watch your step! Obey signs that indicate a closed ramp. These closures are for your safety. When you're on the water, be aware that shoals and snags are closer to the surface as the lake falls. Watch ahead as you drive and lower your speed to compensate for these conditions." Jim Butler added that these conditions are common throughout our area with this summer's severe drought.

"Water and alcohol don't mix!" said Tom Freeman, Assistant Operations Manager for Falls Lake. "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 alcohol-free. We hope everyone will stay sober and be safe!"

"Look out for hazards while boating," said Dianne Batson, Operations Manager at John H. Kerr Lake. "We especially ask people to be careful near the bridge crossing to Clarksville, Virginia, where there is construction going on." Batson also emphasized that 'the other guy' could be a hazard to watch out for. "We ask that everyone look out for others while boating, first because it's just the right thing to do, and second, because not everyone on the lake is a safe driver."

"Stay away from that motor!" Batson also cautions boaters about swimming or playing near the boat's motor exhaust. "Six deaths have been recorded this year because people inhaled carbon monoxide from the boat's motor. Teak/ Drag Surfing, in which swimmers hang onto the rear of the boat, is not just dangerous because of the whirling boat propeller, it can be fatal because of fumes!"

" Courteous boating = SAFE boating," said Acting Operations Manager R.G. Absher at W. Kerr Scott Lake. Absher emphasized that he'd like to see Personal Water Craft operators following some extra cautions. "Be courteous around other boats," he urged. "For your own safety and that of others, slow down at ramp and swim areas and anywhere you encounter congested traffic. Don't follow other boats too closely or jump wakes. Lastly, realize that horseplay with another PWC or boat can take your attention away from other obstacles or people in the water."

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. "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," said Jim Butler. "Our State parks and Park Rangers are also participating with us in the safety programs. They are a great source of help and support. Please call on them for assistance too."

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.

For more information, call the following:

W. Kerr Scott Lake: 336-921-3750

B. Everett Jordan Lake: 919-542-4501, ext. 23

Falls Lake 919-846-9332, ext. 222

John H. Kerr Lake 804-738-6143

Philpott Lake 540-629-4512, ext 224