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Boating Safety Officials Remind Boaters to Avoid Propeller Injuries

SANTA FE, NM – With Memorial Day now behind us, and the 4th of July around the corner, the summer boating season is “officially” under way. Law Enforcement and Boating Safety Officials remind boaters to avoid propeller injuries by following safe boating rules.

“Regretfully, we have had one boating accident this year involving a propeller,” said Toby G. Velasquez, Chief of Law Enforcement and Boating Safety for the New Mexico State Parks Division. “Boaters, please avoid one of boating’s most horrific accidents by following a few simple rules.”

Various types of personal injuries occur due to unsafe boating practices; however, none are more frightening than those involving boat propellers. New Mexico State Park officials want to remind boaters preparing for the upcoming Independence Day holiday that these types of injuries are often horrific. Equally as disturbing, these injuries may have been prevented by exercising basic boating safety practices. The following are a few rules that must be followed if propeller accidents are to be prevented:

Guarding Against Propeller Accidents While On the Boat

- ✓ Many passengers don’t know a boat can bounce or lurch suddenly, and it’s up to the operator to make sure everyone is seated safely inside the boat. Never allow passengers to ride on the bow, gunwales, or transom. If there aren’t enough seats for everyone, extra passengers must remain ashore.
- ✓ Even if everyone is seated inside the boat, slow down when you encounter a large wake. To minimize the impact, cross the wake at an angle, not straight on.
- ✓ Avoid letting anyone aboard drink alcohol in excess, especially when the boat is underway, alcohol is a contributing factor with many propeller injuries.
- ✓ Wear your engine cutoff switch lanyard. It may be necessary to shorten the lanyard when the operator is seated near the engine, especially with smaller outboards with tiller steering.
- ✓ Stay at least 150 feet away from diver-down flags in rivers, lakes, inlets, and navigation channels.
- ✓ Many divers have been killed or seriously injured by propellers. Steer clear from diver-down areas; don’t try to idle by. Be aware that divers have difficulty gauging distance underwater and may stray from their flag. Water current can also cause divers to be swept away from the flag.
- ✓ Don’t let anyone onto the swim platform while the engine is in gear. Swim platforms tend to be slippery and people have fallen into the propeller; this is especially likely to happen when the boat is coming into a dock and the boat bounces off a piling.
- ✓ When launching or un-grounding a boat, keep people in the water away from the stern and propeller. In the rush to get the boat into open water, it’s easy to forget the prop is back there.

Guarding Against Propeller Accidents While Waterskiing or Swimming

Get back to skiers immediately; skiers have been run down by other boats while they were waiting to be picked up. The color of the equipment is very important; lifejackets, wetsuits, and t-shirts, as well as skis and kneeboards, should be bright colors so that the skier will be easily visible to you and to other boat traffic. Skiers in the water who are waiting to be picked up can make themselves more visible by holding a ski out of the water.

Never put the engine in reverse and back toward a skier, or anyone else, in the water. When you pick up a skier, make a gradual turn back and then shut off the engine before you are alongside. When the wind is blowing, always approach from downwind. Do not put the engine into gear until you see that everyone who was in the water is seated safely inside the boat. Just because you hear a voice a few feet away, don't assume he or she is aboard.

Don't use an outboard or I/O's lower unit for re-boarding. Propellers are sharp, even when they're not moving. Finally, never enter swimming zones.

State Park officials remind boaters to always wear a lifejacket when out on the water and to be aware of weather conditions. State law requires that you wear a lifejacket when on a canoe, kayak, or raft and that all children 12 years old and younger wear a lifejacket while on the deck of a moving vessel. The State Parks Division offers FREE boating safety classes around the state and on-line throughout the year.

Celebrate New Mexico's Centennial at YOUR state parks; for more information, call 888-NMPARKS or visit www.nmparks.com.

**Information for this news release was derived from Seaworthy, the Boat U.S. Marine Insurance and Damage Avoidance Report.*



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The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department provides resource protection and renewable energy resource development services to the public and other state agencies.

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