

**Hundreds of Thousands of New Boaters and Paddlers Expected**

**Fourth of July Weekend**

## Water Sports Foundation offers seven safety tips for sharing waterways with inexperienced boaters

**ORLANDO, Fla., June 14, 2022** –Millions of boaters are expected to head out on the water this Fourth of July weekend, including more than 830,000 first time boat buyers who purchased during the COVID-19 pandemic. The increase in crowds coupled with the number of inexperienced new boaters has caught the attention of the Water Sports Foundation.

“While we are pleased to welcome so many new boaters to the water, we believe it is critical to share important boating safety tips that we know will help reduce incidents and save lives this busy holiday weekend,” said Water Sports Foundation Executive Director Jim Emmons. “We’re anticipating a major wave of inexperienced boaters on the water this Fourth of July holiday and we need everyone – our experienced boaters and our newcomers alike – to plan accordingly and be well prepared.”

The Fourth of July weekend traditionally offers a wealth of alluring activities for boaters including cruising to popular gathering spots with family and friends, rafting up or forming flotillas of multiple boats, dropping anchor to swim, grilling favorite foods and of course, capping the festivities with spectacular fireworks shows.

While these activities are longtime mainstays of the boating lifestyle, Emmons says new boaters need to be educated and reminded to avoid potentially hazardous situations. Common mistakes include failing to carry and wear U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets; overloading the boat; passengers standing or moving while the boat is underway; drinking alcohol; launching fireworks from the boat; and ignoring safe boating operations while trying to avoid long lines at the boat ramp after the fireworks show.

The Water Sports Foundation shares seven tips to maximize boating fun and safety this Fourth of July weekend, and beyond:

1. **Important Basics: Plan Ahead & Be Prepared**
* Before launching the boat, conduct a thorough inspection of the vessel and trailer. The local Coast Guard auxiliary or Power Squadron may offer free vessel safety checks.
* Conduct a pre-departure check to make sure all required safety equipment is on board and operational.
* Ensure U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets are available for the weight and size of every passenger, especially youngsters. Life jackets save lives!
* Check current weather conditions and forecast and plan accordingly.
* NEVER overload your boat. Check the vessel capacity plate and comply with all weight mandates.
* For boats 26’ or smaller, comply with the new federal law requiring boat operators to wear and engage Emergency Cut-Off Switch (ECOS). This safety lanyard shuts off the engine if the operator falls overboard.
* Be sure you have the correct number of fire extinguishers onboard and that they are fully charged, and easily accessible. Check expiration date to ensure they fall within newly mandated federal requirements.
* Make sure VHF radios, phones and EPIRB transponders work. Consider carrying a portable cell phone battery charger as back-up.
* Pack sunscreen, first-aid kit, basic toolkit and extra food and water.

**2. File a Float Plan**

* Create a simple, written plan that includes the names and contact information of all those aboard the boat, along with planned destinations, expected departure and return times.
* Leave the plan on file with marina personnel and/or responsible emergency contacts.

**3. Pre-Departure Crew Communications**

* An important and often overlooked boater safety strategy: the captain should always review safe boating protocols and practices with crew and passengers prior to departure, especially when new boaters are aboard.
* This may include instructions for passengers to remain seated when the boat is underway; to keep arms and legs within the vessel; to wear life jackets; and to review pre-appointed assignments such designated observers during watersports activities, etc.

**4. Always Designate a Sober Skipper**

* Don’t drink and drive a boat. Boating under the influence is the primary cause of boating-related deaths in the United States.
* Designate someone who takes the pledge to avoid impairment and be responsible for operating the boat and getting everyone back to the dock safely
* Passengers should also minimize alcohol consumption which can impair activity and judgment.
* Besides safeguarding family and friends from the effects and consequences of alcohol use, marine law enforcement will be heavily patrolling waterways and issuing costly citations to those operating vessels under the influence.

**5. Raft-Up Tips for Large Boat Gatherings**

* New boaters should avoid navigating in major boating hotspots until you’ve gained more experience.
* If you plan to raft-up with other boating friends, meet in advance to discuss strategies prior to departure so everyone knows the game plan.
* Choose your spot carefully. Remember, if you’re positioned in the center of the action, don’t expect to make a fast or easy getaway.
* As you approach the destination, slow down to idle speed.
* Designated observers should be engaged to look out for anchored and moving boats in your path along with swimmers, paddlers and tubers in the area. Approach carefully.
* Once you’ve selected your location, the largest boat in the fleet should anchor first with appropriate line lengths, along with fenders extended on both sides.
* As the raft-up ensues, consider use of a boat hook to help secure boats together. Once hooked, the captain is free to cut the engine, throw dock lines and connect.
* Where possible, tie off at least two dock lines to each boat’s cleats, preferably at the bow or midship, and one at the stern.
* The same slow and deliberate approach should be taken at departure.

**6. Night Moves & Fireworks**

* Novice boaters should avoid operating after sunset, especially when considering the large crowds expected for holiday and fireworks festivities. Experienced boaters should also exercise extra precautions when operating at night.
* Know and comply with approved anchoring locations issued by area marine authorities. Chart your route in advance including positions for navigation markers which may be difficult to see at night. Where possible, deploy GPS electronics to aid in navigation.
* Check in advance to ensure your boat’s running and anchor lights are working. For extra safety, carry a spotlight and flares.
* Give yourself adequate time to reach and/or return to your targeted destination. Due to reduced visibility, travel at slower speeds.
* Be patient and expect delays at busy marinas, boat ramps and docks.
* Keep your boat safely distanced from the fireworks barge, as well as from other boaters.
* NEVER ignite fireworks of any type including sparklers from your boat. Gas fumes from the boat engine could easily ignite.
* Report illegal fireworks activities.

**7. Paddle Safety**

* Paddlers should always wear a life jacket. Three-quarters of people who died while paddling in 2019 were not wearing one. Don’t be a statistic—buckle up.
* Dress for the weather and water temperature.
* Know and follow local boating rules.
* Paddlecraft are small so avoid large boats and crowds. See and be seen. Wear bright clothing and keep a whistle in reach (pro tip: clip it to your life jacket).
* Choose your location carefully. Make sure your skill, experience and craft are a match for the waterway you choose.
* Practice re-entering your kayak, canoe or paddleboard from the water.
* Don’t drink alcohol and paddle.
* Share your float plan (see Number 2 above).

“We want boaters to fully enjoy themselves, have fun and return to the dock safely this holiday weekend,” said Emmons. “U.S. Coast Guard data and our experience confirms that these tips, when followed, will reduce incidents and maximize the fun.”

**About the Water Sports Foundation**

Headquartered in Orlando, FL, the Water Sports Foundation (WSF) is the non-profit educational arm of the Water Sports Industry Association ([WSIA.net](http://www.wsia.net#http://www.wsia.net/category/water-sports-foundation/)). The WSF National Public Relations Outreach including this press release is produced under a grant from the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund, administered by the U.S. Coast Guard.

Journalists desiring free boating safety content, data, infographics and graphics, royalty-free imagery including video, b-roll and still photography, a list of national boating safety experts and more should visit the WSF’s new **National Boating Safety Media Center** at [www.watersportsfoundation.com/media/](http://www.watersportsfoundation.com/media/) or contact WSF Communications Director Wanda Kenton Smith at Wanda@WaterSportsFoundation.com; text 407.697.8055.

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**SOCIAL MEDIA POST***: Best boating safety tips this busy Fourth of July weekend, courtesy #WaterSportsFoundation:* [*https://www.watersportsfoundation.com/hundreds-of-thousands-of-new-boaters-and-paddlers-expected-fourth-of-july-weekend/*](https://www.watersportsfoundation.com/?p=6263)

**PHOTO CAPTION:** The Water Sports Foundation expects millions of boaters on the water this Fourth of July weekend, including more than 830,000 first-time boat buyers. Many may unwittingly engage in unsafe practices such as not wearing life jackets, overloading their boats or standing while underway as depicted here. U.S. Coast Guard data shows that safety education and training can greatly reduce the chance of incidents resulting in injuries or fatalities. For boating safety tips and resources, please visit: <https://www.watersportsfoundation.com/media/boating-safety-education/>.

**MEDIA NOTES:** Journalists who wish to access free boating safety content, data, infographics and graphics, royalty-free imagery including video, b-roll and still photography, a list of national boating safety experts and more should visit the WSF’s new **National Boating Safety Media Resource Center** at [www.watersportsfoundation.com/media/](http://www.watersportsfoundation.com/media/)

To coordinate an interview with WSF Executive Director Jim Emmons about this topic or other boating safety issues, contact WSF Communications Team Members Wanda Kenton Smith at Wanda@WaterSportsFoundation.com - text 407.697.8055; or Joel Staley at Joel@WaterSportsFoundation.com – text 407.242.9994.