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Boating Safety Tips for the Entire Family

Safe Kids Kansas recognizes National Safe Boating Week, May 18-24

Topeka — Warm weather and clear skies signal boaters to head for the lakes across Kansas, but before you go, plan ahead to keep your entire family safe. Safe Kids Kansas reminds families to follow safety recommendations before heading out around or on the water.

In 2011, 70 percent of all fatal boating victims in the U.S. drowned, and of those who drowned, 84 percent were not wearing a life jacket. “On a boat, everyone should wear a life jacket at all times,” says Cherie Sage, Safe Kids Kansas. “Look for a life jacket approved by the U.S. Coast Guard. ‘Water wings’ and other inflatable swimming aids such as inner tubes do not prevent drowning.”

Safe Kids Kansas recommends that children ages 14 and under wear life jackets not only on boats, but near open bodies of water or when participating in water sports. Kansas law requires children ages 12 and under to wear life jackets while boating, and children under 13 are required to wear life jackets on any recreational vessel in waters under Coast Guard jurisdiction.

Safe Kids Kansas urges parents and caregivers to wear life jackets on boats or other watercraft as well. “Your children will pick up and embrace your safety habits,” says Sage. According to a study by Safe Kids Worldwide, children follow the example of adults and are much more likely to practice safe habits when they witness similar behavior by parents and caregivers.

Safe Kids Kansas also reminds parents and caregivers:

- ❖ Always wear life jackets when in or around open bodies of water and on boats. Make sure the life jacket fits snugly. Have the child make a “touchdown” signal — if the life jacket hits the child’s chin or ears, the life jacket may be too big or the straps are too loose.
- ❖ Enroll your kids in swimming lessons taught by a certified instructor, but don’t assume swimming lessons or life jackets make your child “drownproof.” These precautions are important, but they’re no substitute for constant and active adult supervision.
- ❖ Don’t let kids under 16 operate or ride on personal watercraft (such as jet skis).
- ❖ Never drink alcoholic beverages while boating — a large portion of boating accidents that occur each year involve alcohol consumption by both boat operators and passengers.
- ❖ Nobody should swim near a dock or marina with electrical hookups or lighting — swimmers can be electrocuted in the water and drown.
- ❖ Make sure the boat operator has passed a boating safety course approved by the Coast Guard before letting your child and your family ride in the boat. For more information about safe boat operations, contact the Coast Guard Infoline at 800-368-5647 or visit www.uscboating.org.



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- ❖ When everyone is watching the kids, no one is watching the kids. When more than one adult is present and children are swimming, use the Water Watcher card strategy. Adults take turns in intervals providing active supervision to the children. To download a Water Watcher card, visit www.safekids.org.
- ❖ Install a carbon monoxide detector on your motorboat to alert you to dangerous levels of exhaust fumes.
- ❖ Learn infant and child CPR. In less than two hours, you can learn effective interventions that can give a fighting chance to a child who has fallen into water and become unconscious. Many local hospitals, fire departments, Red Cross offices, and recreation departments offer CPR training.

National Safe Boating Week is an annual educational campaign, coordinated by the National Safe Boating Council (www.safeboatingcouncil.org), running the week prior to Memorial Day.

For more information about drowning and boating-related injuries, call Safe Kids Kansas at 785-296-0351 or visit www.safekids.org/watersafety.

Safe Kids Kansas, Inc. is a nonprofit Coalition of over 70 statewide organizations and businesses dedicated to preventing accidental injuries to Kansas children ages 0-14. Local coalitions and chapters cover Allen, Butler, Cowley, Dickinson, Doniphan, Douglas, Elk, Ellis, Finney, Geary, Harvey, Johnson, Kiowa, Labette, Marion, Marshall, McPherson, Meade, Mitchell, Montgomery, Pottawatomie, Riley, Saline, Sedgwick, Shawnee, Smith, and Sumner counties, as well as the city of Emporia and the Metro Kansas City Area (Wyandotte county and several Missouri counties.) Safe Kids Kansas is a member of Safe Kids Worldwide, a global network of organizations whose mission is to prevent accidental childhood injury. The lead agency for Safe Kids Kansas is the Kansas Department of Health and Environment.

This information can be made available in alternative accessible formats upon request. For more information about obtaining an alternative format, you may contact Safe Kids Kansas at 785-296-1223, or csage@kdheks.gov. Both speech/hearing disabled and hearing Kansans can access the Kansas Relay Center by calling toll-free 1-800-766-3777. Callers should inform the relay operator of the number they wish to call and the type of call they are making direct, credit card, collect, person-to-person, etc.

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