

LAKE SAFETY WATCH

Police Chief Urges Caution as Lakes Get Busier During Spring and Summer

As spring break continues and the summer months approach, local authorities are reminding residents that safety should be the top priority during lakeside excursions.

"The lakes will be crowded this week, and we want everyone to enjoy themselves while boating safely," said Horseshoe Bay Police Chief Jason Graham in a recent statement.

The Horseshoe Bay Police Department, in coordination with Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) and the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA), is launching a safety awareness campaign ahead of what is typically one of the most hazardous periods of time for Texas boaters.

SAFETY FIRST

Chief Graham emphasized that having a designated sober operator is essential for all watercrafts. "Boat responsibly and don't mix alcohol with your day on the lake," he advised.

Statistics show that the probability of a fatal boating accident is doubled when alcohol is involved. Authorities will be patrolling the Highland Lakes throughout the week, and boaters should be aware that Boating While Intoxicated (BWI) carries penalties like driving while intoxicated, including possible driver's license suspension.

LIFE JACKETS SAVE LIVES

Perhaps the most crucial safety measure is proper use of personal flotation devices (PFDs). Records indicate that most boating fatality victims are recovered without wearing a life jacket.

"A life jacket should be the first thing you put on, not the last thing you think about," Chief Graham noted.

Parents should be particularly vigilant, as children younger than 13 years old must wear a PFD while on any vessel. Boats should always carry extra PFDs in both adult and child sizes.

EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

Boater education is not just recommended, it's the law for many lake users. Anyone born on or after September 1, 1993, who operates a vessel over 15 horsepower, a wind-blown vessel over 14 feet, or any personal watercraft must have completed a boater education course.

Surprisingly, data shows that 52% of vessels involved in boating accidents are operated by persons between the ages of 26 and 50, not inexperienced teenagers as many might assume.

Information on boater education courses is available on the TPWD website (tpwd.texas.gov/education/boater-education) or by calling (800) 792-1112.

SPECIAL RULES FOR PERSONAL WATERCRAFT

Jet skis and other personal watercraft (PWCs) have additional safety requirements. All PWC operators and passengers must wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved PFD, and operators must maintain a 50-foot distance from other watercraft, persons, shores, and stationary platforms unless operating at idle speed.

"Before borrowing or renting a PWC, take the time to learn how to operate it properly," advises Chief Graham. "A few minutes of instruction can prevent hours of tragedy."

MIND YOUR SPEED

While there are no posted speed limits on the water, citations may be issued for excessive speed or reckless operation. With increased traffic on the lake, maintaining a safe speed becomes even more critical.

"We want everyone to have fun this spring and summer," said Chief Graham. "But more importantly, we want everyone to make it home safely."

The Horseshoe Bay Police Department will be conducting safety checks throughout the week. For more information on boating laws or to report unsafe behavior, contact the Horseshoe Bay Police Department at 830-598-2633. For all emergencies, please dial 911.