WATER SAFETY – Level 2

BOATING SAFETY

Boating is another water activity that many people enjoy. As with any water activity, safety practices should be planned and carried out. This section on boating will primarily focus on the safe use of small watercraft: canoes, row boats, sailing craft, small inboard and outboard motorboats, rubber rafts, etc.

A Safe Boating Plan

Just as swimming lessons are important before swimming, so boating instruction is important before boating. Anyone using a boat should know how to use it and understand safety guidelines for that craft in the water. Since any boating outing may result in an accident in which a person ends up in the water, boaters should be good swimmers and/or wear a life preserver.

To be safe in a watercraft, a person must know how to operate the boat and its equipment under a variety of conditions. This knowledge will come only through proper instruction and experience in boat handling. How a boat will handle and behave is determined by how it is propelled, its size and shape and the water and weather conditions. Different organizations offer boating instruction and water safety programs. It is strongly recommended to learn safe boating skills through a certified boaters safety program.

Federal and state laws have been enacted to safely regulate boating. One universal law requires a U. S. Coast Guard approved personal flotation device (life preserver) for each person aboard. Many other laws vary by the state, the body of water and the type of craft. Before boating, learn the laws regulating the equipping and handling of watercraft in your area.

Another consideration before boating is the equipment for the watercraft. Federal and state laws make certain requirements depending on the size of the craft, its purpose and the body of water. Some of the items required may include a bell, fire extinguisher, whistle and bow and stern lights. Other items important for safety are bow and stern lines, a bailer, an anchor, extra oars or paddles and a first aid kit. Of course, one life preserver per person is required. Check the regulations for your watercraft. Make sure your boat and all of its equipment is in good working order before an outing.

It is important to plan a safe time and location for your boating activity. Be familiar with the area in which you are boating. If trouble arises, know where help can be reached. Consider these points before boating:

- The weather (forecasted fronts and storms, high winds, etc.
- Darkness (don't be caught in the dark without proper lighting)
- Strong currents, waves, or rapids
- Shallow water
- Obstacles (partially or fully submerged rocks, logs, stumps, weeds, etc.
- Other boat traffic
- People in the water (swimming areas, water skiers)

A Safe Boating Experience

From the time you step into the boat to the time you return from your outing, correct procedures must be followed. Certain practices will vary with different watercraft, but safety is the rule.

BOARDING AND DEBARKING: There are two main principles of safety to follow when getting into and out of a boat: keep your center of gravity low and distribute your weight evenly so the boat stays balanced.

When boarding and debarking by a pier, make sure the craft is secured at the bow and stern. Be aware that piers and boats may be slippery: wear nonskid shoes and be careful when stepping. Step one foot into the center of the boat, not allowing the boat to tip to either side. As you step, your hands should grab the left and right gunwales (sides) keeping your weight low. Hold on firmly as you bring your other foot aboard. Reverse the procedure when leaving the craft.

When boarding and debarking by the shore, make sure the boat is secured to the shore. The craft should be totally in the water with the bow and stern barely touching the shore. Step over the bow (or stern) placing one foot along the centerline as both hands grasp the gunwales. Keep your weight low as the other foot is brought aboard. Continue to hold on to both gunwales as you move to the middle or back of the boat. It will be easier to push off of the shore with your weight toward the far end of the craft. Reverse the procedure when you debark at the shoreline.

If more than one person intends to board or debark, the person in the boat should maintain boat balance by holding on to the gunwales or pier as other step in or out.

LOADING AND TRIMMING: The maximum amount of weight and number of people a boat can hold should be printed on its capacity rating plate. If your boat does not have a rating plate, an acceptable capacity will usually be one person per seat (or thwart); or the gunwales at their lowest point should be at least six inches above the water when the boat is fully loaded. If your craft is difficult to handle or the wind and waves are strong, more than six inches may be needed. Overloading a boat will make it less safe.

Trimming refers to placing the weight of the gear and passengers so that the craft is balanced side-to-side and front to back. If too much weight is placed in the bow, stern or either side, a loss of control may result. Once the craft is underway, slight adjustments may be needed for a safe, smooth and efficient ride.

CHANGING POSITIONS: There is rarely a need to change positions in a small boat while on the water. If the need arises, certain safety procedures must be followed. Only one person should move at a time. As one person moves, he should keep his weight low and centered holding onto the gunwales; the other passenger(s) help keep the boat balanced. Changing positions in strong waves or currents is not advisable. In some small craft, standing upright may cause the boat to tip. Do not horseplay in the boat.

RULES OF THE ROAD: When on the water, boats must follow certain rules to avoid collisions. Laws have been established to determine the "rules of the road" when craft meet, cross and pass each other. Although specific rules may vary for different areas, the following guidelines are standard for most inland bodies of water.

1. Motorized craft are to give the right of way to non-motorized craft.
2. Meeting--when two boats meet each other head on, boats should keep to there right (as cars would on a road).
3. Crossing--when one boat is on course to cross the path of another, the boat on the right has the right of way. The boat on the left must slow down or change course.
4. Passing--when a boat plans to pass another, it must properly signal to pass on the left or right. The passing boat does not have the right of way and must give consideration to the other boat, keeping a safe distance while passing.

No matter which boat has the right of way; every craft must take all necessary action to avoid collision.

BUOYS AND MARKERS: Buoys and other markers are used to identify specific areas for boaters. Boaters must be aware of the location and meaning of these markers. Buoys may indicate swimming areas, diving areas, no wake and speed limit zones, channels to travel through and partially or fully submerged obstacles in the water. Learn the messages of all the water markers where you are boating.

Rescue in a Capsized or Swamped Watercraft

If safety procedures are correctly followed, most accidents can be avoided. If your boat does capsize or get swamped, it is designed to float in the water. Boats are constructed with flotation material to keep a capsized or swamped boat afloat for people to hold onto.

If your craft is capsized or swamped, stay with the boat. It is much easier for rescuers to locate a boat in trouble than to spot an individual swimmer. You can hold onto the boat and wait to be rescued, or you may hold onto the boat and swim it ashore. Only leave your craft if it is being carried toward a dangerous area (a waterfall, dam or rapids) or the water is extremely cold.

Whether you are in a motorized or self-propelled craft, boating can be a fun experience. Remember to use common sense while you are having fun. Control your craft for a safe trip.

WATERFRONT AREA SAFETY

Even when not swimming or boating, precautions must be taken when near the water. When walking, hiking or fishing along the shoreline, keep a firm footing to avoid slipping and falling into the water. Stay away from steep-sloping banks and deep drop-offs at the water's edge. Running, pushing or horseplay near the water may result in an accident. If walking barefoot along the shoreline, beach or in shallow water, look out for sharp objects like glass, metal or pointed rocks. NEVER leave a child or a weak swimmer unattended near the water.

Take precautions on piers, rafts, and boat landings. These are often slippery especially when they are wet. Watch out for loose boards and piers that are not firmly founded. Maintain your balance on floating-type piers and rafts. As mentioned with the shoreline, do not run, push or horseplay on a pier; NEVER leave a child unattended on a pier.

Water is a wonderful gift from God. We can use it for all types of activities from cleaning to swimming to boating. It can be dangerous, however, so you need to follow good safety practices to have lots of fun.

BE SAFE AND ENJOY