



Press Release

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COAST GUARD AUXILIARY CONCERNED ABOUT SPIKE IN BOATING FATALITIES RELATED TO NOT WEARING LIFE JACKETS

Auxiliary partners with boating retailer and PFD manufacturer to promote “Fit to Float” campaign

As the beginning of boating season draws near in many parts of the country, the Coast Guard Auxiliary continued to express concerns about the number of boating fatalities that occur each year, many as a result of not wearing life jackets (PFDs).

According to the latest available statistics from the US Coast Guard Office of Boating Safety, boating deaths in the United States increased for the first time since 2002. This is a cause for concern for the Coast Guard Auxiliary, as well as the many other organizations actively engaged in promoting recreational boating safety.

The number of fatalities in 2005, which is the latest data available, increased to 697 deaths, up from 676 in 2004.

“We are making progress toward improving safety on our waters,” said Peter Urgola, Chief- Vessel Examinations Department of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. “We have more registered boaters than ever before, but we shouldn’t accept more deaths. This spike in fatalities concerns us greatly, and is certainly a setback.”

Urgola likened the wearing of lifejackets on the water to wearing a seat belt in your vehicle. “It just makes sense to wear one.” Yet recent studies by the Coast Guard indicate that the life jacket wear rate is less than 10 percent among adults, which is much lower than for seat belts.

To raise awareness about this important public safety issue, the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, Stearns Incorporated (one of the world’s leading manufacturer of life jackets), and Bass Pro Shops (a leading outdoor retailer), are teaming up on the nationwide “Fit to Float” campaign. The goal of the “Fit to Float” campaign is to prevent drownings across the U.S. by educating the public on the importance of wearing a proper fitting life jacket.

“It’s about more than just *wearing* a lifejacket,” Urgola said. “It’s also about wearing the right lifejacket. Many people think they can use their lifejackets for years and years, or hand them down from one generation to the next. Truth is, lifejackets get worn out and lose their effectiveness. You need to check lifejackets for wear and buoyancy at least once a year.”

Urgola said an old, faded, waterlogged, leaky or ill-fitted PFD can be dangerous in that they provide a false sense of security, and should be discarded.

“A poor fitting PFD can sometimes do more harm than good,” Urgola said. “Lifejackets that are too big will push up around your face and prevent you from breathing. Lifejackets that are too small won’t keep you afloat. Also, lifejackets meant for adults do not work for children.”

How do you know whether a life jacket is still functional or fits properly? "The Auxiliary's free Vessel Safety Check(VSC) program is a great way to identify worn out PFDs, and to learn how to make sure a life jacket fits properly," said Urgola. To obtain a free VSC for your boat, visit www.safetyseal.net and click on "I WANT A VSC," or call 1-877-875-6296.

The “Fit to Float” campaign features a lifejacket exchange. The public can trade-in their old or ill-fitting lifejackets at a local Bass Pro Shop store and receive a discount off the purchase of a new light, less restrictive Stearns lifejacket or Suspenders brand inflatable PFD. The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and the Stearns, Inc. Safety Team will be at the stores on select dates to demonstrate the proper fit of a lifejacket and answer questions. The trade-in program will be held during Bass Pro Shop’s Boating and Camping Classics, which runs thru June 2007.

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U.S. Coast Guard statistics (For more details, visit:

http://www.uscgboating.org/statistics/Boating_Statistics_2005.pdf)

- 70% of boating fatalities were drowning victims
- 87% of drowning victims were not wearing PFD’s
- 60 % of fatalities were result of capsizing or falls overboard
- Florida led in fatalities (80 deaths), followed by California (58)

For more information about the “Fit to Float” campaign go to www.stearnsinc.com or www.basspro.com.

The United States Coast Guard Auxiliary is composed of uniformed, non-military volunteer's who assist the Coast Guard in all of its varied missions, except for military and direct law enforcement. These men and women can be found on the nation's waterways, in the air, in classrooms and on the dock, performing Maritime Domain Awareness patrols, safety patrols, vessel safety checks and public education.

The United States Coast Guard Auxiliary was founded in 1939 by an Act of Congress as the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve and re-designated as the Auxiliary in 1941. Over 27,000 members donate millions of hours annually in support of Coast Guard missions.

For more information on the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary, visit us at www.cgaux.org or www.axupa.org .