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Make Safety Part of Your Summer Fun

JUNE 30TH 2014 BY DEE LOFLIN

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*Submitted by
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Missouri - The Missouri State Highway Patrol reports that thus far, June 2014 has included 10 drownings in Missouri. Colonel Ron Replogle, superintendent of the Patrol, urges everyone to make safety a top priority as they enjoy Missouri's variety of rivers and lakes. Please follow these simple guidelines when swimming, floating, or taking part in any activity near water.

Swimming Safety

Even for children or adults who have good swimming skills, rivers and lakes contain elements that can make swimming dangerous. Swimmers and floaters need to be aware of currents, aquatic life, drop-offs, and floating debris at all times. As a swimmer, know your limits. All swimmers are encouraged to use a U.S. Coast Guard approved life jacket, especially young children and inexperienced swimmers. Everyone needs a swimming buddy—don't allow anyone to swim alone. Supervise all children in or near water, regardless of age. Exhaustion is a real concern. Exhaustion can occur if a swimmer is very tired, if they swim too long or too hard, if they are dehydrated, or a combination of these and other factors. Younger, inexperienced swimmers may become exhausted before they realize they are in trouble. Drink plenty of water regularly, before you

feel thirsty! Avoid drinks with alcohol or caffeine.

River Safety

This time of year finds many Missourians floating our vast number of rivers. A float trip can be a lot of fun, especially when everyone prepares with safety in mind. The group should discuss expectations regarding behavior and safety before the trip begins. Be aware of each person's swimming ability. If you stop along the way to swim, designate a responsible adult to supervise the swimmers at all times. Swim in places with calmer currents that are free of debris. Rope swings and jumping off bluffs/bridges might look like fun. However, you should avoid jumping into the water in this manner as there could be submerged logs or tree branches, which would cause injury.

Here are several more tips specific to floating:

- * Wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved life jacket at all times. Even gentle stretches of water can have unseen undercurrents. Trying to fight a swift current will exhaust swimmers of every ability.
- * Use sunscreen, and wear a hat and sunglasses to protect you from the sun. Wear water shoes. If your canoe/kayak/inner tube capsizes, they will protect your feet. Walking in rivers can be dangerous.
- * No one may have or use glass containers in any vessel that is easily susceptible to swamping, tipping, or rolling.
- * Scout the river section you intend to float. Be familiar with the river and its individual characteristics. Make a rescue plan if necessary. Pair an experienced paddler/floater with someone of less experience.
- * Learn to recognize river hazards such as strainers, dams with reverse hydraulics, boulders, barb wire across the river, eddies, etc.
- * Know your limits and do not attempt a section of river beyond your skill level.
- * Do not paddle or attempt to cross rivers in flood stage or after a heavy rain. Currents can become very swift, even in a normally shallow river.
- * If you capsize, hold onto your craft and move immediately to the upstream side to avoid being trapped between the boat and an obstacle. Float on your back, feet together and pointed downstream. Gradually work your way to the shore. Release your craft only if it improves your safety.
- * Tie all your gear into the boat, but never yourself, children, or pets. Do not stand up in swift water (feet can get caught in rocks) but swim with the current at a 45

degree angle toward the shore.

- * Carry the proper equipment, including dry clothing and a first aid kit. Store all extra gear in a secure watertight container.

- * Stay sober. Alcohol and drugs affect balance, judgment, coordination, swimming skills, and the body's ability to stay warm.

- * Avoid being "too" — too tired, too drunk, too much sun, too far from safety, too much strenuous activity.

- * Learn basic water rescue techniques. When attempting a rescue, remember the adage of "Reach - Throw - Row - Go for Help." Unprepared rescuers run the risk of being caught in the same dangerous situation and can become a victim themselves. If you have to go after someone in the water, always put on a life jacket first.

The Missouri State Highway Patrol encourages everyone to enjoy Missouri's lakes and rivers. But, remember: A little forethought and planning help make summer fun safer.

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