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Public Information Statement  
National Weather Service Headquarters Washington DC  
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From:        Therese Z. Pierce  
              Chief, Marine and Coastal Weather Services Branch

Subject: National Safe Boating Week: May 21-27, 2011

The National Weather Service and the National Safe Boating Council will partner for National Safe Boating Week, May 21-27. The week will highlight weather and safety-specific Public Service Announcements for the recreational boating public. Topics include wind and waves, thunderstorm safety, safe navigation in fog, life jacket wear, and boating under the influence.

Before you and your family get out on the water this year, grab a life jacket and "Wear It!" Nearly 85 percent of those who drown while boating were not wearing a life jacket. Wearing a life jacket is one of the simplest and most effective life-saving strategies for safe recreational boating. Boaters are required to have a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket on board for every passenger on their vessel.

Wind and waves affect all types of boats, so it is important all boaters know basic facts about winds and waves. Wind over water is usually stronger than over nearby land. Winds and waves can change quickly in speed, direction, and steepness, so always check the marine forecast before taking your boat out on the water.

The effects of alcohol and drugs are just as hazardous on the water as on land. Boating under the Influence, or BUI, affects judgment, vision, balance and coordination. These impairments can increase the risk of being involved in a boating accident, for passengers and boat operators. Alcohol is a contributing factor in about a third of all recreational boating fatalities. It is illegal in every state to operate any boat or watercraft while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Thunderstorms can be a mariner's worst nightmare. They can develop quickly and create dangerous wind and wave conditions. Thunderstorms can bring shifting and gusty winds, lightning, waterspouts, and torrential downpours that turn a day's pleasure into a nightmare of distress. A lightning strike to a vessel can be catastrophic, especially if it results in a fire or loss of electronics. If your boat has a cabin, stay inside and avoid touching metal or electrical devices. If your boat doesn't have

a cabin, stay as low as you can in the boat. Ultimately, boating safety begins ashore with planning and training. Keep in mind that thunderstorms are usually brief, so waiting it out is better than riding it out.

Chances are you will occasionally encounter reduced visibility in fog over the water, and you will need to know how to navigate through it safely. Fog forms when air over a warm water surface is transported over a colder water surface, resulting in cooling and condensation. Fog is usually considered dense if it reduces visibility to less than one mile. Fog can form quickly and catch boaters off guard. Visibility can be reduced to a few feet, disorienting boaters. If you encounter fog, navigate at a slower than normal speed. Turn on all of your running lights, even in daytime. Listen for sounds of other boats that may be near you, or for foghorns and bells from nearby buoys. Use Global Positioning System (GPS) or a navigation chart to help obtain a fix on your location. If you are unable to get your bearings, stay put until the fog lifts, but make sure you are in a safe location.

Understanding a marine forecast is critical to safe boating. Weather and wave conditions can change suddenly, catching boaters off guard and creating life threatening conditions. Typical marine forecasts predict wind speed and direction, wave heights and periods, roughness of near shore waters, and significant weather. Marine forecasts cover large areas and the forecast elements are often given in ranges. The ranges represent average conditions over a period of time (usually 12 hours) and the actual conditions at a particular point may be lower or higher than the forecast range. Take particular note of any current advisories and warnings, including Small Craft Advisories and Gale or Storm Warnings, which alert mariners to either high winds or waves occurring in the short term. Special Marine Warnings are issued for sustained marine thunderstorm winds or frequent gusts of 34 knots (39 mph) or greater, waterspouts (tornadoes over water), and hail of 3/4 inch or greater. Marine weather statements follow up these warnings and also can be issued to bring attention to significant rapidly changing conditions on the water including an increase in winds, non-severe thunderstorms, development of dense fog and even snow squalls or strong and gusty rain showers.

For more information on hazardous weather and boating safety, visit the following websites:

<http://weather.gov/safeboating>

<http://safeboatingcouncil.org>

National Public Information Statements are online at:

<https://www.weather.gov/notification/archive>

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