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Public Information Statement
National Weather Service Headquarters Washington DC
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From: Mark Tew
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Subject: National Safe Boating Week May 19-25, 2012

NWS and the National Safe Boating Council will partner for National Safe Boating Week, May 19-25. The week will highlight weather and safety-specific Public Service Announcements for the recreation boaters. New for 2012 will be increased focus on the issue of hypothermia, a serious threat all boaters need to be aware of before going out on the water. Other topics will include the use of distress radio beacons, know as EPIRBS, winds and waves, thunderstorm safety, understanding your marine forecast, life jacket wear, and boating under the influence. For more tips, see the links below:

<http://www.nws.noaa.gov/os/marine/safeboating/>

<http://www.safeboatingcouncil.org/>

To increase the awareness of hypothermia, NWS and the National Safe Boating Council partnered with Nick Schuyler, who has written a book and taken part in numerous interviews recounting his tragic boating accident in February 2009. You can see videos from that interview on our National Safe Boating Week Page and on this YouTube page. Note this link will take you of this Federal Government site:

<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL829AEFA308A8D278>

Hypothermia causes your core temperature to drop below the minimum temperature for normal metabolism and body functions, 95°F. If exposed to cold the internal mechanisms are unable to replenish the heat lost, a drop in core temperature occurs. As body temperature decreases, symptoms occur such as shivering and mental confusion occur. Heat is lost more quickly in water than on land. Water temperatures quite reasonable as outdoor air temperatures can lead to hypothermia. A water temperature of 50°F often leads to death in 1 hour, and water temperatures hovering

at freezing can lead to death in as little as 15 minutes. Even water at the seemingly warm temperature of 79°F will, after prolonged exposure, can cause hypothermia.

Distress radio beacons, also known as emergency beacons, or EPIRBs, are tracking transmitters that aid in the detection and location of boats, aircraft, and people in distress. These beacons are radiobeacons that interface with the worldwide service, Cospas-Sarsat, the international satellite system for search and rescue (SAR). When manually activated, or automatically activated upon immersion, such beacons send out a distress signal. The signals are monitored worldwide and the location of the distress is detected by non-geostationary satellites. For more information on emergency beacons, go to the Sarsat website:

<http://www.sarsat.noaa.gov>.

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 most effective and simple 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 some 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 it is important you include a marine forecast in your preparations for boating.

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 both 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 can 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. Avoid being on the water during a thunderstorm. Ideally, you should have a professionally installed lightning safety system installed. As a last resort, 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 1 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 fog horns and bells from nearby buoys. Use 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.

For more information on hazardous weather and boating safety, along with a link to the Nick Schulyer interview, visit the following websites:

<http://nws.noaa.gov/safeboating>
<http://safeboatingcouncil.org>

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NWS Public Information Statements are online at:

<http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/notif.htm>

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