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Michigan officials urging caution on waters

12 drowning deaths reported in SE Michigan

11:47 PM, May. 29, 2011 | [Comments](#)



Boaters should wear a life vest at all times, officials say, and create a "float plan" in case there is an emergency. / Lansing State Journal file photo

Written by **Tammy Stables Battaglia**

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Authorities are urging caution in the wake of a deadly boating season in Michigan.

There have been at least 12 drowning deaths in Southeast Michigan this year - even before beaches and pools open for the season.

That has local officials warning those who plan to hit the water to take precautions as Memorial Day weekend begins.

In 2010, eight people drowned across the state during Memorial Day weekend, with five in metro Detroit.

Safety class

The Marine Patrol Division of the Clinton County Sheriff's Office will hold boaters' safety classes from 6-9 p.m. Wednesday-Thursday at Victor Township Hall, 6843 Alward Road, Laingsburg. The free classes are for ages 12 and older. For more information and to register, call (989) 224-5200.

For swimmers

• Don't overestimate your ability to handle the water

Macomb County Sheriff Anthony Wickersham said he's especially concerned about Lake St. Clair, where 37-year-old Hassen Randel of Eastpointe drowned while boating in April.

"The lake is a great place to relax, swim and be with your family and friends. But if not respected by not following the rules and regulations, it could turn tragic,"

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• The American Canoe Association offers hands-on courses for novice to experienced paddlers of canoes, kayaks, rafts and other floatables. For information, go to www.americancanoe.org.

Wickersham said Friday from the agency's Marine Division on the lake in Harrison Township.

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U.S. Coast Guard Lt.

Justin Westmiller said 10 people have drowned so far this year in waterways patrolled by the Detroit sector of the Coast Guard. Three died in the western basin of Lake Erie; the rest drowned throughout the Detroit River and into Lake Huron near Tawas, in the Thumb, he said.

In Milford, 16-year-old John Przydatek of Harrison Township and 48-year-old Doug Killingbeck of Milford drowned May 21 in the Huron River.

The number of accidental drownings in Michigan has remained relatively constant since 1990, with between 89 and 137 deaths each year across the state, according to the Michigan Department of Community Health. The most recent statistics available show 89 people died in 2004; 123 in 2005; 103 in 2006; 114 in 2007, and 110 in 2008.

Paddle sports are the fastest-growing segment of recreational boating, with more than 300,000 kayaks, canoes and paddleboards sold annually, the Coast Guard said.

The Coast Guard Auxiliary now offers a Paddlesports America course, a four-hour, classroom-based introduction to paddling safety, techniques and safety strategies.

The most important water safety tip: Wear a life vest, Westmiller said. In addition, those enjoying the water should heed their ability to swim in deep areas, strong currents or other potential swimming hazards, he said.

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