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Man missing after boat flips

By Kevin Eigelbach
Post staff reporter

A Petersburg man is feared drowned after the 22-foot boat he was driving on the Ohio River hit a rough patch of water and went end over end near Aurora, Ind., investigators said today.

The search for Graham Cottingham, 39, resumed about 7:30 a.m. He was identified by a spokesman for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. Cottingham was the only one of five people aboard the boat still unaccounted for.

A 10-year boy and three other passengers were injured in the crash, which happened about 4:30 p.m. Sunday. The boy was identified as Matt Knapp; the others included his father, Matthew Knapp Sr.; Heather Fitzgerald, 27, of Lawrenceburg, Ind.; and Mark Krumpelman, 27, of Petersburg.

None of the injuries to the other passengers were considered life-threatening, although the child was moved to Children's Hospital Medical Center to be treated for broken bones.

The 10-year-old had a broken tibia, broken fibula and neck and back pain, Baumbauer said. Fitzgerald had a leg laceration and one man had a broken leg, he said. Another man declined treatment.

Witnesses estimated the boat was traveling "very fast" at the time of the crash, Indiana Department of Natural Resources 1st Sgt. Bill Baumbauer said.

"The speed was evidently pretty good, anywhere between 60 and 100 mph," Baumbauer said. "It looks like he hit some rough water and went end over end."

Rescue workers searched the river until after dark Sunday, looking for the pilot of the twin-hulled boat. The U.S. Coast Guard closed a four-mile stretch of the river from just upstream of Aurora to just downstream of Laughery Creek until about 9 p.m. on the Indiana side of the river and about 10 on the Kentucky side.

Members of the Boone County Water Rescue squad arrived at the accident scene within three minutes of it happening, Baumbauer said.

However, about 7:30 p.m., squad officials turned control of the investigation over to the Indiana DNR, he said, because they felt the Indiana DNR had more expertise.

Divers from Boone County Water Rescue continued to search, along with divers from the Indiana State Police, the Indiana DNR and the Aurora Fire Department.

Many residents watched the search from Lesko Park, a riverfront park in Aurora.

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The heavily damaged, 22-foot boat was recovered and taken to the Lighthouse Marina just west of Aurora, where it will be examined by accident reconstructionists from the Indiana DNR, Baumbauer said. The boat had two hulls with a single motor, a modified V-8 automobile engine, he said.

From the side, the boat would have looked much like a cigarette-style boat, he said, so-called because the sleek profiles remind people of cigarettes.

Six people were injured June 27 off the Dayton, Ky., waterfront when a cigarette-style boat hit their boat. Investigators believe a cigarette boat owned by a Columbus, Ohio, man may have been involved.

So far, no charges have been filed in that crash.

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