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# Prevention key safety factor

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Put on your life jacket and pay attention.

And remember, nature's in charge. Not you.

That's the advice of water safety officials as the boating season dawns in Greater Cincinnati.

**ADVERTISEMENT** The most common problem, says Boone County Water Rescue Capt. Dale Appel, is boaters who leave the dock unprepared and don't pay attention to other boats once they are out on the water.

That can leave boaters stranded or in the path of a barge - the biggest safety risk on the river because barges can't stop or change paths abruptly.

It's a family sport, says Appel. "People think it's a bunch of drunks out here all the time, and that's really not the case. The people out here, for the most part, are really good people, very family-oriented."

"People need to have their safety equipment ready - not stowed away, but wearing it," Appel said, adding the boat should be checked out and in proper working order.

Kentucky state law requires one life jacket on board for each passenger. Children age 12 and under must wear a life jacket at all times on the water.

Prevention is the key, agrees Petty Officer David Clifford of the U.S. Coast Guard Marine Safety Detachment in Cincinnati.

"(Boaters) assume because they can see the bank, everything's safe, and that's not always the case," said Clifford.

Kentucky law bans drinking on its waterways. It's illegal, Clifford said, to have any open container of alcohol on board.

Appel recommends boaters also leave a "float plan" with the marina, a relative or friend. The one-page plan can help authorities locate a stranded boat and know when to start searching for missing people.

Law enforcement from Ohio and Kentucky patrols the river, but Boone County Water Patrol is one of the largest. Last boating season, the patrol made 18 major rescues.

The patrol, founded in 1967, is the oldest water rescue agency in Northern Kentucky and the only one on the river every weekend day during boating season from Memorial Day to Labor Day. The patrol is also on call seven days per week during boating season.

The 34-member, all-volunteer crew patrols a 60-mile stretch of river.

They range from Big Bone Lick to downtown Cincinnati, and several miles down the Licking River. Paramedics are always on board, and the patrol has state-of-the-art sonar and radar technology to spot anything from objects on the river floor, to boats in the path of an oncoming barge.

But, Appel said, "Even with the best technology known to man, nature's still in charge."

Although the Ohio River falls within Kentucky boundaries, the state shares jurisdiction with the Coast Guard and surrounding states - so their laws apply as well.

The Hamilton County Sheriff, the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Ohio



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Matt Purcell takes a ride down the Ohio River as part of his function with the Boone County Water Rescue patrol. With the new season approaching, officials warn boaters to observe all the rules of the waterway.

### By the numbers on the water

• Number of boats registered in Northern Kentucky in 2006:

3,085 in Boone County

2,331 in Campbell County

3,514 in Kenton County

519 in Gallatin County

1,223 in Grant County

Source: *Kentucky Transportation Cabinet*

• Barges transport more than 239 million tons of cargo on the Ohio River each year. Each barge can carry 1,500 tons, equal to the weight of 58 semi trucks with cargo. A typical 15-barge tow carries 22,500 tons - 870 semis with cargo.

Source: *U.S. Coast Guard*

### By rule

#### It is illegal to operate a boat:

- On public waters at any time between sunset and the following sunrise.
- Within 50 feet of a commercial motor vessel and its tow.
- Under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- If the boat isn't licensed and registered with the state.
- If children under the age of 12 on board aren't wearing life jackets.
- For those aged 12-17 who do not have a boater education certificate proving completion of a safety course.
- With a child under age 12 at the helm.




Source: *Kentucky Revised Statutes*

Department of Natural Resources patrol the river, and the Cincinnati Police Department will begin patrolling this summer. Most Northern Kentucky riverfront cities also have police or fire boats in case of emergency or for big events like Riverfest.

Boone County's patrol members have seen and done it all during the past 40 years: from water-skiing accidents to propeller cuts, and from fishing corpses out of the water to rescuing boaters thrown overboard by large waves on the Ohio River.

"At the end of the day, if you've saved one or two people from being seriously hurt or injured, and if all my crew's home safely, it's a good day," Appel said.

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Ken Purcell, and his son, Matt Purcell (left), push the boat out of the marina as the Boone County Water Rescue patrols the Ohio River.

### On the Web

For more information, visit [fw.ky.gov](http://fw.ky.gov).

To download a float plan, visit [www.bcwr-ky.com](http://www.bcwr-ky.com).

To take a free online safety course, visit [www.boat-ed.com/ky](http://www.boat-ed.com/ky).

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