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Be safe on the water this holiday weekend

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CLEMSON — Officials are stunned that already in 2010, 15 lives have been taken on South Carolina waterways.

The official kickoff to summer doesn't arrive until Monday, yet that total already surpasses the number of deaths recorded in all of 2009.

Robert McCullough, representative from the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR), said boating accidents can be avoided if the proper safety precautions are followed.

"So much of it is common sense," he said. "Make sure you have enough life vests, fire extinguishing power, lights and most importantly, a good eye to watch your surroundings. The high number of deaths is nothing to take lightly. We will be stepping up our patrols for the Memorial Day weekend."

In 2008, 709 recreational boating fatalities occurred in the United States. Of those, 502 were by drowning. And among the drowning victims, 90 percent were not wearing a life vest. Motorboats, jet skis, even canoes were represented in the toll.

Some beaches have even started offering free life jackets to swimmers, like at 12-mile recreational park.

"First off, families shouldn't come swimming without life jackets," said Molly Murph, a Seneca mother. "But if for whatever reason they don't, it's great that funding has been set aside to make sure people can use one if they want to."

South Carolina's law enforcement will be in full force just in time for the Memorial Day weekend, by land and by water.

"When a family goes out for a weekend, they expect to go out and have a good day on the water," said DNR Colonel Alvin Taylor.

Officers say they see too many deadly crashes in the months that lie between Memorial Day and Labor Day.

"Sadly, however, these summer trips too often become nightmares," said SC Highway Patrol Colonel Kenny Lancaster.

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SAFETY TIPS

- **Let someone** know where you are going.
- **Gather** all lifesaving devices. Make sure they are in good serviceable condition and are the correct size for all passengers.
- **Check** the fuel and the battery charge.
- **Make** sure lights are in good working condition on the boat and trailer.
- **Don't** operate the boat under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- **When** operating sailboats, be aware of overhead power lines and wires.
- **Boats** approaching from the right have the right of way.
- **If** the boat capsizes, stay with it.