Boaters: It's vital to know the rules of the road

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
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Everyone expects the roadways to be crowded during this upcoming Fourth of July holiday weekend, but if you live in, near or frequent any of our area lakes, you know that our waterways will be just as crowded too as the Fourth of July is typically the peak of boating season.

The Highway Patrol has posted billboards asking you to be safe (and sober) this weekend. The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources also asks the same thing and will once again be conducting courtesy safety inspections at some public boat landings.

Boats are required to have certain safety equipment on board the vessel and these rules vary based on the length and use of the watercraft. DNR boating safety and enforcement officers will perform a quick, but thorough inspection for required safety equipment and proper boat and motor registration. Those who are not in compliance with safety regulations or registration requirements will not be ticketed during the complimentary inspections. Instead, they will be given an opportunity to correct the problem before they launch their boat. DNR officers will also be available to answer questions and give boaters tips on how to stay safe on the water.

Here's a look at a few of the items that are involved in a safety check that you can get free of charge:

• All boats must have a US Coast Guard-approved wearable-type PFD for each person on board or being towed. Each PFD must be in good condition, readily available and the proper size for the intended wearer. In addition, boats 16 feet in length or longer must carry a Type IV throwable device. In South Carolina, any person under 12 years of age must wear a US Coast Guard approved Type I, II, III, or V PFD when on board a class "A" (less than 16 feet long) boat.

• One Coast Guard approved hand-held portable fire extinguisher must be aboard each boat less than 26 ft. if the boat is carrying passengers for hire or if the construction permits the entrapment of flammable vapors or if it has a permanently installed gas tank, including gas tanks that use any type of fastener that would hamper the immediate removal of the tank from the boat. Additional extinguishers are required in boats larger than 26 feet Contact the SCDNR for complete regulations.

• Navigation Lights must be on between official sunset and sunrise.

• Flares are required for vessels in coastal waters.

• Vessels less than 65.6 feet in length, which includes PWCs, are required to carry on board a whistle or horn or some other means to make an efficient sound signal to announce intentions or positions.

• In South Carolina, each person on a personal watercraft must wear a US Coast Guard-approved Type I, II, III or V PFD. A personal watercraft may not be operated between sunset and sunrise and must be equipped with a self-circling or lanyard-type engine cutoff switch. When operating a personal watercraft, one may not operate in a manner so as to leave the water completely while crossing (jumping) the wake of another vessel within 200 feet of the vessel creating the wake.

• Boat operators under boating course approved by the SCDNR to operate a boat or personal watercraft with a 15 HP motor or greater, unless accompanied by an adult age 18 years or older.

Courtesy boat inspections July 2, July 3 and July 4 will be held at the following locations:

JULY 2

Anderson County: Riverfork Forks Boat Ramp/ McCormick County: Dorn Landing/Lake Thurmond, 10 a.m. to noon; Oconee County: South Cove Park/ Lake Keowee, 10 a.m. to noon; Pickens County: Twelve Mile Park/Lake Hartwell, 10 a.m. to noon.

JULY 3

Greenwood County: Greenwood State Park/ Lake Greenwood, 10 a.m. to noon; Spartanburg County: Main Ramp/Lake Bowen; 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.

JULY 4

Laurens County: Riverfork Public Landing/ Lake Greenwood, 10 a.m. to noon; McCormick County: Scotts Ferry/ Lake Thurmond, 10 a.m. to noon.

PHILLIP GENTRY is the host of "Upstate Outdoors," broadcast from noon to 2 p.m. Saturdays on 106.3 WORD FM.