

State law cracks down on abandoned boats

Convicted offenders face \$5,000 fine, 30 days in jail

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SENECA — Starting today, boat owners who abandon their vessels for an extended period of time could feel it in their wallets.

The new law would make it a misdemeanor for someone to leave a boat for more than 45 days on public lands or waters or on private property without the property owner's permission.

If convicted, offenders face a fine of not less than \$1,000

or more than \$5,000 and/or 30 days in jail.

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (DNR) law enforcement spokesman Lt. Robert McCullough said Monday that having a law on the books to deal with abandoned boats has been long overdue.

McCullough said the problem is of more common in coastal areas, but Upstate lakes and rivers are not exempt from abandoned water vessels.

"Occasionally, we get cases of boats sinking or getting wrecked, and the owners

decide not to do anything," McCullough said. "It causes problems to others."

According to the law, an abandoned watercraft is defined as any that has been moored, stranded, wrecked, sinking, sunk and has been left unattended for more than 45 days. The statute does not apply to watercraft abandoned in an emergency, although after an emergency, the owner or operator is expected to recover the watercraft.

DNR law enforcement Col. Alvin Taylor called the measure "another tool to deal with navigational and environmental hazards." Taylor said abandoned watercraft could float free and cause damage to private property and leak fuel.

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