

Two things stand out vividly in my memory about growing up on the shores of Lake Hartwell during the 1970s, when my family maintained a summer home there.

The first was an automobile accident where somebody blew through a stop sign, resulting in a collision that catapulted 6-year-old me into the dash of my uncle's Ford F-100 pickup. Like a lot of kids in those days, I was sitting unrestrained straddling the gearshift between two adults who were also not wearing seatbelts.

That memory, a bloody nose and a busted lip were my reward for the event.

The second was riding in the family's green Glassmaster tri-hull boat — complete with a Johnson 88 Seahorse outboard motor — and falling overboard when the driver made a sharp turn to pick up a fallen water skier. That event was far less traumatic, because tied around my neck and chest was a big rectangular block of orange lifejacket that my parents insisted I wear.

Fast forward to today. I still spend a lot of weekends on the shores of Lake Hartwell, boating, fishing and enjoying the water. On the way to the lake, I never put the truck in drive unless my seatbelt is securely fastened, yet I'm not entirely sure which compartment on the boat the lifejackets — a requirement by law to have on board — are stowed in.

The United States Coast Guard's annual report of recreational boating statistics revealed a total of 658 deaths and 2,817 injuries as a result of recreational boating accidents in 2017. Victims drowned in 75 percent of fatal accidents, while 80 percent of those victims who drowned weren't wearing a lifejacket.



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Advances in lifejacket design now make wearing them much easier and more comfortable during on-the-water activities.

## Lifejackets save lives

THIS WEEK, the man was reminded yet again of how quickly a favorite pastime can turn tragic with the loss of another life on Lake Hartwell. After a multi-day search, the body of Martin Acevedo, a boater who disappeared into the lake, was recovered Wednesday.

According to Capt. Robert McCullough of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, Acevedo was a passenger on a 19-foot bass boat that apparently struck a wave while the boat was moving, ejecting both occupants. McCullough added Acevedo wasn't wearing a lifejacket.

From 1985-98, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration decided to use advertising to promote seatbelt use. Motorists became

intimately familiar with Vince and Larry, the slapstick crash-test dummies who became household names.

The campaign was wildly successful, not only in getting legislators on board with passing mandatory seatbelt usage laws, but also with profound public awareness.

Agencies like SCDNR, the Coast Guard Auxiliary and the National Safety Council have been pushing lifejacket usage for years, and while statistics are showing some improvement, the movement is far behind the success of the historic seatbelt campaigns.

One possible explanation is the legislative backing. In South Carolina, all boats must have a Coast Guard-approved, wearable-type personal flotation device for each person on board. Only children under the age of 12 and operators of

personal watercraft are required by law to be wearing lifejackets.

Neighboring states have enacted laws requiring all occupants of a vessel to wear approved lifejackets while the vessel is moving or the main motor is above idle speed. South Carolina would be well advised to consider similar requirements.

With all the campaign promises being slung about during this election year, maybe the timing is right for South Carolina to get some much overdue legislation in boating safety.

**PHILLIP GENTRY** is the host of the "Upstate Outdoors" broadcast from noon to 2 p.m. Saturdays on 106.3 WORD FM. The show can also be heard online at 1063WORD.com live or via podcast. This week's guest will be Sandy Campbell, Natural Resource Program Manager for the United States Army Corps of Engineers — Lake Hartwell.