



## New laws, patrols make boating safer

*By Crystal Harden, Post staff reporter*

A zero tolerance for drinkers, more officers patrolling waterways and new regulations should make boating in Kentucky safer this year.

The General Assembly passed new laws, most of which are already in effect as the boating season officially begins this Memorial Day weekend.

The laws set a mandatory age limit for operating Jet Skis and other personal watercraft. Anyone under 12 years old cannot operate personal watercraft or motorboats of more than 10 horsepower.

In addition, the laws set uniform standards for people who are charged with driving boats while drinking.

The new laws didn't dampen enthusiasm among boaters who flocked to the river over the weekend, although sporadic thunderstorms - including a hailstorm on Sunday - sent them scurrying for cover.

"Amazingly enough, our parking lots are full. We've got a lot of people in their boats and out on the water," said Keith Koerner, general manager of Watertown Yacht Club in Dayton, on Sunday.

"When the sun broke through they started to stream in," said Paul Nowak, an employee of Williamstown Lake Marina.

The new laws won't discourage boating, but state officials expect to see a difference on the water.

"Do we think this will have an impact? We think so," said Mark Marraccini, an assistant to the commissioner of the state Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources.

The laws, sponsored by state Rep. Royce Adams, D-Dry Ridge, were prompted by an accident in 1995 that killed a 25-year-old Florence woman. Noreen Hunley was floating in an inner tube on Lake Williamstown when a 10-year-old on a personal watercraft hit her.

One law hasn't taken effect yet. Beginning next year, children ages 12 to 17 will not be allowed to operate watercraft unless they have a safe-boating certificate or are accompanied by someone who is at least 18 or someone who has a safe-boating certificate.

Violators will be fined \$50 to \$200.

Classes to obtain the certificates should be available soon, Marraccini said. An announcement will be made statewide when they open, he said.

"The goal is to create a whole new generation of boaters who have gone through this certification program," he said.

The department has cross-trained its fish and wildlife officers in boating safety. At least 185 officers will be capable of working the waterways and enforcing boating laws, he said. That's three times as many officers as in years past.

"We have a lot more people out there to help it make it safer, to create a safer atmosphere," Marraccini said.

Boaters whose blood-alcohol level exceeds 0.10 percent can be charged with drunken boating under the new law. Drunken boaters can be fined \$100 to \$250 for the first offense, \$250 to \$500 for the second offense and \$500 to \$1,000 and/or up to 30 days in jail the third time.

Those who refuse to submit to a Breathalyzer test also can be fined.

"There is a zero tolerance for a drunk on the water, and if you're out there and you're drunk and we find you, we will remove you," Marraccini said. "That means you're going to jail."

Officers have in the past cited boaters who were drinking by using public-intoxication laws.

"With the boating-under-the-influence law, we have a standard that is uniform statewide," Marraccini said.

Operators of personal watercraft must abide by safe-boating rules to

reduce hazards, including no weaving through congested boat traffic or cutting between a boat and a water-skier. And, no one will be allowed to operate personal watercraft after sunset.

Dale Appel, chief of Boone County Water Rescue, said he thinks most boaters are trying to follow the rules, even as the number of boats on Kentucky's waterways increases.

"I feel very positive about it," he said. "I think we'll have a safe, clean year."

The water rescue unit will have two boats patrolling the river today.

"I think with the restrictions that are out there right now people are going to think a little more about breaking the rules," he said.

### **Watercraft laws**

The new laws also put additional restrictions on personal watercraft:

**People riding** personal watercraft must wear life jackets.

**Anyone towing** a water skier with personal watercraft must have an observer on board or rear-view mirrors.

**The watercraft** must have self-circling capabilities if the operator is knocked off, or a cut-off switch attached to the operator.

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