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TO: News / Assignment Desk or News Editor

Safety Tips for Boating Season

The Memorial Day holiday weekend traditionally marks the start of boating season on the Delta. Significant numbers of boaters are expected to be on the water this summer, especially on the weekends, to go fishing, boating or take part in other recreational activities, like water-skiing.

The Contra Costa County Office of the Sheriff Marine Services Unit would like to remind all boaters to be safe, alert, and obey the rules. Here are some important ones:

-As of January 1, 2019, anyone 25 or under who operates a vessel that is propelled by an engine, regardless of whether the engine is the principal source of propulsion, must have in their possession a California Boater Card issued by the state. For more information on the California Boater Card, go to <https://www.dbw.ca.gov>.

-All vessels must have a U.S. Coast Guard approved life jacket for each person. The life jacket must fit the person intending to wear it. Children under 13 must always wear a life jacket while aboard any vessel, regardless of length, unless they are surrounded by an enclosed cabin or bulkhead.

-You must be at least 16 years old to operate a power boat or personal watercraft. All persons on a personal watercraft are required to wear an approved life jacket.

-Boats over 16 feet are required to have an approved throwable flotation device which must be readily accessible.

-Always travel at a safe speed. Slow down in narrow channels and blind areas and navigate on the right side of the waterway. At a cross waterway, the boat on the right has the right of way.

-Blue Light law — Any vessel approaching, overtaking, being approached, or being overtaken by a moving law enforcement vessel operating with a siren or an illuminated blue light, or any vessel approaching a stationary law enforcement vessel displaying an illuminated blue light, shall immediately slow to a speed sufficient to maintain steerage. Boaters cannot make a wake near a law enforcement vessel displaying a blue light.

-Always have an emergency kit that includes a flashlight, warm clothing, cell phone, VHF radio and chart. For emergencies on the water, boaters should call 911 or Sheriff's Dispatch at (925) 646-2441. Be sure to file a float plan before you depart.

Boating under the influence (B.U.I.) enforcement is a high priority. Those arrested for B.U.I. will face the same consequences as those who drive a motor vehicle under the influence, including fines and possible jail time.

The 'ABC's of Boating', a handbook of boating rules, is available from most boating shops. Boaters can go to the California Division of Boating and Waterways website at www.dbw.ca.gov for information on boating safety and the California Boater Card. If anyone has any questions about boating safety, please contact the Marine Services Unit at (925) 427-8507.