



# EarthWatch Rhode Island



## **Topic: Safe Boating - What Rhode Islanders Need to Know About Keeping Children and Adults Safe While on the Water**

**Air Date: August 20, 2006**

### **Background:**

The DEM Division of Law Enforcement provides 24-hour patrols on the state's waters, enforcing Rhode Island's marine safety laws and regulations, and conducting investigations of all boating accidents that result in personal injury, death, or severe property damage. The Division also enforces Rhode Island's laws and regulations governing the state's multi-million dollar commercial fish and shellfish industries, and the recreational take of fish and wildlife.



**This DEM Marine Patrol Boat s used to patrol the water and monitor boating safety.**

A recent change in state law requires that all children under age 13 in any recreational vessel under 65 feet in length wear a life jacket approved by the US Coast Guard while underway in Rhode Island waters, unless below deck or in a closed cabin. Underway means that a vessel is not at anchor, or made fast to the shore or aground. This rule applies to all recreational vessels less than 65 feet in length, powered or non-powered.

The new law makes the state consistent with US Coast Guard regulations. The change, which took effect in July, replaces language that required children 10 years of age and younger in boats up to 26 feet in length to wear such flotation devices.

The purpose of this law is to protect our children when they are on our waterways, and to also instill safe boating habits at a very early age that will be carried on into adulthood.

DEM's Environmental Police Officers are using the rest of the current boating season to educate boaters of the change in the law; we have notified area Coast Guard stations, included the new information in challenge exams, boater guides, the on-line boater safety course, and on the DEM website, [www.dem.ri.gov](http://www.dem.ri.gov).

Although the new law applies only to youngsters, and only topside when the boat is underway, it's just common sense for people of all ages on all sizes of boats to wear life

jackets. Life jackets are the most effective way to save boaters' lives, and DEM encourages everyone to wear them any time they are in a boat.

Rhode Island has mandatory boating education requirements. Anyone born after January 1, 1986 who operates a vessel with a motor that exceeds 10-horsepower, and anyone who operates a personal watercraft (jet ski) regardless of age must be certified in order to operate a vessel in RI waters. State approved classroom boating safety courses are available through CCRI (Lincoln and Warwick); contact CCRI at 333-7070 for course schedule. Classes sponsored by US Power Squadron and Coast Guard Auxiliary are held throughout the year at various locations. Links to this available on DEM website.



Environmental Police Officer, Jenn Connors demonstrates how a life jacket should properly fit.

A home study course is available through DEM's Division of Law Enforcement. A state approved online course is available through DEM's website. Anyone taking a home study or online course must take a challenge exam with a certified instructor. Exam dates and additional information are available from DEM's Division of Law Enforcement.

#### **Helpful tips for Channel 10 viewers:**

- Life jackets save lives. Wear a life jacket any time you are on a boat.
- Boaters are required to have the following safety equipment on board: properly fitted lifejacket for each person on board, a sound-producing device (horn or whistle), fire extinguisher, throwable device (ring), visual distress equipment (flares or pistol).
- Make sure safety equipment is easily accessible, and that you know how to use each piece of equipment. In time of an emergency, seconds count, and you don't want to be searching for safety equipment or reading instructions on how to use them at such a time.



Channel 10's Dylan Dryer interviews Steve Bain, a boat owner, on the steps he takes to ensure his passengers' safety.

#### **Interviews:**

- DEM Environmental Police Officer Jenn Connors
- DEM Environmental Police Officer Mark Saunders
- Steven Bain, owner of 26' recreational boat, Sea Rod

#### **More information:**

Viewers can find more information on the web: DEM website, [www.dem.ri.gov](http://www.dem.ri.gov), Boating Safety under Timely Topics on the Home Page.