



## Boating Safety



Events in early spring 2001 remind us again that all boaters need to take care, particularly those on the water in small boats when the weather may be warm but the water is still cold and the flows are swift.

An April 8 boating accident on Slippery Rock Creek in McConnell's Mill State Park, Lawrence County, demonstrates the power of swiftly flowing water. A Slippery Rock University student tragically drowned while kayaking on the swollen currents of the creek. The tragedy was compounded when two Butler County firefighters, Assistant Fire Chief Anthony Murdick, 25, and firefighter Scott Wilson, 25, drowned while undertaking recovery operations. Governor Tom Ridge said it best when he observed that the loss of these two firefighters is a solemn reminder of a great Pennsylvania tradition: "The men and women who regularly risk their lives to protect the rest of us." Governor Ridge paid tribute to the bravery of the two firefighters:

*These young men were volunteers. They were not paid to put their lives on the line. They did so because they had the skills and the wills to try to help their fellow man. They are a credit to Pennsylvania's emergency-response community. These men—and their sacrifices—will not be forgotten.*

The Fish & Boat Commission joins in extending our sympathies to the families of the victim of the boating accident and the firefighters who assisted in the recovery efforts.

Even with the tragic loss of life that has accompanied boating accidents this spring, boating remains one of the safest outdoor activities. Considering the continued growth and popularity of boating in Pennsylvania, 2000 was one of the safest boating seasons on record. There were 90 accidents reported last year, compared with 125 in 1999.

In 2000, boating accidents accounted for 12 fatalities. This number reflects the 10-year average for the state, and it appears low in comparison with the 4,500 or so accidental deaths, including traffic accidents, that occur in Pennsylvania each year. However, our goal continues to be ZERO fatalities on our state's waterways.

We think that our expanded educational efforts over the last 18 months played a part in reducing the number of boating accidents. As a result of the personal watercraft (PWC) safety certification requirement that went into place last year, we issued some 49,000 Boating Safety Education Certificates—a record number. Even though the requirement certification applied

only to PWC operators, we found that about half of the course attendees were not PWC operators, but users of other types of boats. Obviously, the PWC education requirement has had a positive ripple effect on other boaters as well.

Effective law enforcement is another reason for the success of our boating safety efforts. Last year, our officers and their deputies spent more than 60,000 work hours performing boating law enforcement. When we meet with anglers and boaters throughout the state, they praise the efforts of our officers and often ask for more enforcement on our busiest boating waters.

For 2001, we're making it more convenient than ever for all boaters to take a boating course and earn a Pennsylvania Boating Safety Education Certificate. Boating courses are now available online on the Internet, and boaters can also take a video boating safety correspondence course from the convenience of their homes. The Commission has contracted with a vendor to provide two boating courses for distance learning. Both courses are approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators. Students can visit our web site at [www.fish.state.pa.us](http://www.fish.state.pa.us) to link to the Internet boating course. The vendor charges \$15 for this course. In addition to giving boaters the chance to earn a Boating Safety Education Certificate online on the Internet, the Commission's vendor has now made available a video-based home study boating safety correspondence course, which costs \$24.95 plus shipping and handling. To order, call 1-800-460-9698.

Successful students in the Commission-designated

Internet and correspondence courses will be issued a temporary Boating Safety Education Certificate good for 90 days. A Commission-issued permanent certificate will automatically follow.

So far this year, we've issued about 2,500 Boating Safety Education Certificates. Nearly 200 of these were earned by taking the Internet course during its first few weeks of operation. We've heard great things from boaters who have taken the online course. They like the format, and they're taking it seriously, spending many hours online with the course materials and practice tests

before taking the final examination. Ninety-five percent of those taking the Internet course passed the final examination. Even though most online students have been aged 26 to 45, students have included youngsters under 16 and seniors over 65.

