



MIKE LUKAS  
Sheriff

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## News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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### Operation Dry Water to Focus on Boating Safety Portage County Sheriff's Deputies to Focus on Impaired Boating

The Portage County Sheriff's Office joins the U.S. Coast Guard, the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) and others in the annual [Operation Dry Water](#) campaign, a coordinated campaign to educate boaters about the dangers of boating under the influence of alcohol or drugs. During the *Operation Dry Water* three-day heightened awareness and enforcement weekend, July 3-5, boaters will see an increase in outreach, education and enforcement surrounding boating under the influence.

Alcohol use continues to be the leading known contributing factor in recreational boater deaths and a leading contributor in boating accidents.<sup>1</sup> The mission of *Operation Dry Water* is to reduce the number of alcohol- and drug-related incidents and fatalities on the water. Wisconsin DNR and local law enforcement agencies will be out educating boaters on ways to stay safe while on the water, which includes always boating sober and avoiding any alcohol- or drug-use prior to and while boating.

“Getting out on the water over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend is an enjoyable and relaxing activity for many. We have partnered with *Operation Dry Water* to help keep boaters safe by educating operators and passengers on the dangers of boating under the influence,” said Sheriff Mike Lukas. “Staying sober while boating is a critical part of boating safely. Boaters should also take a boating safety education course prior to getting on the water and everyone on board should always wear a life jacket while near or on the water. We want all boaters to enjoy their time on the water in a way that allows everyone to return home safely.”

Outreach partners and volunteers will be out on the water and at marinas, working collaboratively with law enforcement to educate boaters about safe boating practices. Law enforcement will also be detecting and removing impaired operators from the water. No matter where you are boating, it is illegal to operate a boat under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

In 2019, the increase in law enforcement participation led to a positive increase in recreational boater outreach as well. The goal of *Operation Dry Water* and those who participate is not only to remove impaired boaters from the

<sup>1</sup> [2018 U.S. Coast Guard Recreational Boating Statistics](#)

water, equally important is the goal of raising awareness throughout the year among recreational boaters about the dangers that come with the decision to operate a vessel while under the influence. In 2019, Wisconsin DNR officers contacted 2,410 vessels, 6,801 boaters, issued 202 boating citations and removed 25 impaired boaters from the water. For the 2019 calendar year, 254 citations issued for alcohol violations statewide. In 2019, there were 82 reportable boat incidents in, 50 people injured and 9 fatalities.

The Portage County Sheriff's Office is urging boaters to enjoy this boating season and help keep everyone safe by not drinking alcohol while on the water, or operating a boat after you have consumed alcohol. Use of both legal and illegal drugs also impairs judgment and reaction time and makes it dangerous to operate any vessel.

Boaters can learn more about boating under the influence by visiting [operationdrywater.org](http://operationdrywater.org). Operation Dry Water is coordinated nationally by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) in partnership with the U.S. Coast Guard.

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