

Safety tips for boating these holidays

Underage and uncertified minors should under no circumstances be allowed to navigate boats or other sailing vessels, the South African Maritime Safety Association (SAMSA) has warned.



Source: pixabay.com

As South Africans head to their holiday destinations for the festive season, SAMSA points out that underaged children are not allowed to navigate a vessel under any circumstances.

Children navigating vessels as well as navigating under the influence of alcohol or drugs are the main causes of boating mishaps on South Africa's dams and seas.

Imraan Davis, safety inspector at SAMSA, says while sailing accidents do not occur as frequently as road collisions, South Africans heading to dams and the sea for their holiday need to “respect water and the water will respect you”.

The blood alcohol level for navigating a vessel is the same as for road users – 0.05g per 100ml.

Davis says that in addition to ensuring that an unlicensed or inebriated person is not in control of a vessel, boat owners also need to ensure their vessels are licenced and their skipper certificate is in good order.

Water activities

South Africans must also check with local authorities what water activities – skiing, jet skis, diving – are allowed on dams before they engage in them.

“You can only waterski if the local authority allows it. Holidaymakers must also establish what type of water activities are allowed,” says Davis.

He says that there also needs to be an observer on the vessel along with the skipper if it is being used for waterskiing and that the skipper should stop or slow down immediately if the skier falls off and raise his flag to alert other boat users of the skier in the water.

South Africa has several major dams and bodies of water which are magnets for boaters including Vaal, Loskop, Bronkhorstspuit, Hartebeespoort, Club Mykonos and the Knysna Lagoon.

Davis says while there is no speed limit for sailors, skippers should be responsible and obey the rules.

“These rules are in place to ensure the safety of everyone on the water. SAMSA wants everyone to have an enjoyable and safe holiday which is why we are urging anyone who will be spending time on the water this summer to behave in a responsible manner,” he says.

Do's and don'ts of water safety

These are the do's and don'ts of water safety:

- Ensure your vessel has been certified safe to be on the water
- Ensure the person navigating a vessel is in possession of a valid skipper's certificate of competence. Skipper training courses are mandatory for anyone operating power-driven vessels.
- Check which water activities are allowed before you launch your vessel
- Do not allow underage and uncertified children to take control of vessels
- Do not operate a vessel under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Check your boat/vessels before you take off on a trip
- Ensure that you have the necessary number of approved life jackets for the vessel. Ensure that children wear appropriate life jackets that fit correctly.
- If you are engaging in waterskiing, ensure you have an observer on board to monitor the skier. Slow down or stop and display your flag as soon as the skier comes off his / her skis.
- All boat engines produce carbon monoxide (CO), an odourless, colourless and poisonous gas that can kill in minutes. Boat owners are encouraged to ensure they have proper cabin ventilation. Use CO detectors and ensure passengers stay off the swim platform when engines are running.
- Safety begins with the skipper. Consider other water users (fishermen; swimmers; other boats). Report bad behaving boaters to the local authorities.
- Operate at a safe speed and always maintain a careful lookout.
- Always check the weather forecast. A good calm day can quickly turn into an ugly one on the water. Keep an eye out for

changing weather conditions.

- Inform the local authorities, gatekeepers, boat club and family members of your trip with an estimated time.
- Vessel owners are required to report to their nearest SAMSA office, within 24 hours, any vessel that has been lost, abandoned or stranded; seriously damaged or which has caused serious damage to another vessel; on which any casualty resulting in loss of life or injury has occurred; or which is or has been in a position of great peril.

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