



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers®**

# **Vicksburg District Boating and Water Safety Strategic Campaign Plan**



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## **I. PURPOSE.**

The Vicksburg District plan analyzes water-related fatality statistic trends nationwide and within the District, identifies key educational messages for target groups, and recommends methods for educating the public about boating and water safety. These recommended methods include a summary of District campaign action descriptions, partnership endeavors, interagency cooperation and National program assistance. Appendix A contains a list of annual project specific public safety initiatives. The goal of this safety campaign is to reduce the number of water-related deaths and mishaps. This document was developed as a tool to ensure all those within the District are aware of the District's Water Safety Programming efforts.

## **II. INTRODUCTION.**

**A. Background.** The Vicksburg District, one of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' largest civil works districts, in both size and activities. The District consists of an area 68,000 square miles, encompasses seven major river basins, including 278 miles of the Mississippi River's main stem, in Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi. The District is also responsible for approximately 800 miles of commercially navigable streams and rivers including the Ouachita-Black system, the Pearl, the Red and the Yazoo Rivers.

Vicksburg District manages 165 recreation areas in Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi, nearly 2,500 miles of shoreline and 174,000 total acres of water surface for water based recreational activities. These recreation areas attract more than 70 million visitor hours each year, with the majority of these hours spent in water related activities. Lake Ouachita, hosts the largest marina in Arkansas, with the largest number of house boaters in the state.

**B. District Objective.** The CESO/CECW memorandum, dated 15 Sep 2006, subject: Visitor Recreation Safety, provided a new USACE objective to reduce the recreation-related public fatality rate by 40% from the baseline rate, by the end of fiscal year 2008. Based on this guidance, the District set forth to re-established the District's Water Safety Programs as a vital portion of each office's public outreaching programs. In order for the District to uniformly address water related fatalities, the Operations Division established the District Project Delivery Team (PDT) to set goals and objectives for the District's safety programming.

### **III. PUBLIC FATALITY DATA AND TRENDS ANALYSIS.**

Records from 1997 to 2007 indicated the District has had 70 drownings occur during this time frame, an average of 6.4 drownings per year, with years 1998 (12) and 1999 (11) having the largest number of drownings for those years. During those same years, visitation was 76,777,600 visitor hours for 1998 and 70,982,500 visitor hours for 1999. Since 1999, the number of drownings in the District have fluctuated with no significant trends being evident.

A. When Drownings Occur. Data have shown that historically most drownings occur during times of peak visitation and therefore, as visitation increases, the potential for fatalities increases. The majority of drownings at USACE projects occur on weekends during the months of April through Sept.

B. Activity. Swimming and boating constitutes the two largest categories of recreational activities that lead to drowning. Nationally for USACE, between FY98 and FY07, 47% of the deaths were swimming-related and 42% were boating-related.

1. Boating: Collisions are the main reason for boating accidents, according to the U.S. Coast Guard statistics. However, falling overboard and the vessel capsizing are the main causes of boating-related fatalities. They also reported that 70% of all reported fatalities occurred on boats where the operator had not received boating safety instruction. Nationally, the USACE water-related fatality rate from falling incidents is 20%, capsizing is 8%, and collisions are 8%. In 2007, the Vicksburg District had 2 fatalities related to boating, 1 due to collision of a jet ski and a swimmer, the second due to boater falling overboard, where alcohol was involved.

2. Swimming: Nationwide in the USACE this is the highest (47%) cause of all water-related fatalities with 81% of all swimming fatalities occurring while swimming at non-designated, but legal portions of the shoreline, such as along the shore of a campground. Therefore, only 19% of swimming-related drownings nationwide occur at designated swimming beaches. Efforts are to encourage all swimmers to swim only in designated swimming areas, in 2007, the two swimming related drownings that occurred in the Vicksburg District one did occur in a designated swimming areas, however, the swimmer was properly supervised, but health related issues were a contributing factor in the drowning situation. National experts estimate that two-thirds of drowning victims are either poor or non-swimmers. People exceeding their swimming abilities is speculated to be the main reason for swimming-related fatalities. The second swimming related drowning occurred both outside a designated swimming area, swimmer fully clothed and exceeded their swimming ability.

3. Diving: Diving-related injuries paralyze thousands of people each year. However, USACE statistics for these non-fatal accidents are not kept and detailed information from any reliable source was not found.

C. Gender. The majority of water-related fatality victims are male. Males constitute 89% of USACE water-related fatalities. 2007 District statistics, 100% of the water related fatalities were male.

D. Age. Throughout the USACE, statistics show 41% of all drownings occur to individuals between the ages of 18-35. Due to the geographical location and many of the District's lakes being close to several major college universities where a large number of individuals are found in the largest age bracket of the Corps' drowning fatalities, the District has made great efforts to promote water safety practices for this population, by partnering with local college coaches and celebrities to promote water safety practices.

E. Life Jackets/Personal Flotation Devices (PFD). U.S. Coast Guard data indicate that 90% of victims in 2006 were not wearing a life jacket. Nationally, USACE's data indicate over 92% of victims were not wearing a life jacket. In our District, in 2007, 100% were not wearing a life jacket. It is a well-known fact that those who die in boating accidents have life jackets with them, but do not bother wearing them. Some USACE projects have implemented PFD requirements at their projects under the District Engineer's Title 36 authority, section 327.12.a-posted restrictions. Those who have done this have typically been projects with low visitation and therefore they did not have many political or negative repercussions from it. In 2008, USACE requested Districts volunteer to conduct an applied, and monitored for effectiveness, life jacket wear requirement exercise beginning in 2009.

F. Alcohol. The U.S. Coast Guard reported in 2006 that 20% of all boating fatalities involved alcohol. According to USACE statistics drugs and/or alcohol over a 10 year period were factors in 22% of the fatalities and 14% were unknown. In our District, in 2007, 25% were confirmed to involve alcohol. Involvement of alcohol or drugs is difficult to determine unless an autopsy is performed.

G. Minorities. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting Systems (WISQARS), drowning is the third leading cause of unintentional injury deaths in the United States for Hispanics of all ages, as compared with the sixth leading cause when all races are included. Thirty-eight of these Hispanic drowning deaths are in the 15-44 year old age group. Race is not tracked in USACE fatality statistics; however, there is speculation that swimming-related fatalities are on the rise among those of Hispanic origin.

#### **IV. WATER SAFETY EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS.**

A. District Water Safety Project Delivery Team (PDT). In 2006, a District Water Safety PDT was formed to combine the District's efforts in promoting water safety programming uniformly throughout the District. The PDT meets semi-annually to develop the goals and objectives for the year and evaluates the past year's performance. The team consists of representatives from each field office and advisory representative from Project Resources Management Office. This PDT has re-energized the District's Water Safety Programming and allowed resources to be shared between the various offices. For example, during the 2007 Recreation season, through the PDT's efforts, two Water Safety Saturation weekends were conducted one at Lake Ouachita and one at Grenada Lake, where over 5,000 positive water safety contacts were made during these weekends.

B. Water Safety Related Partnerships. In these times of reduced budgets and the increase in visitation to the District's projects, each office has had to reach out to the area businesses and other governmental/private agencies to assist in the promotion of water safety education. Partnerships have been established with the Wildlife Agencies in Mississippi, Arkansas and Louisiana; US Coast Guard Auxiliary; Local Power Companies and businesses such as Wal-Mart and Chick-Fil-A.

C. Educational Activities. In order to promote boat safety education, many of the project personnel have volunteered to attend the State's Boater Education Instructor courses, in order to provide the opportunity for the visiting public to attend a boating education course with relative ease and in proximity to the lake where many will be boating. Through these mandatory classes, boaters learn the safety practices needed to ensure a safe boating experience.

#### **V. CONCLUSION.**

This Vicksburg District campaign plan analyzes water-related fatality statistic trends nationwide and within the District over the past year, identifies key educational messages for target groups, and indicates the goals and objectives of the District's Water Safety PDT for the 2008 Recreation Season. Our goal is to reduce the number of water-related deaths and mishaps, and minimize potential liability claims against the government. Our objective established by the MVD Recreation Safety Program memorandum dated 14 April 2008, is to reduce the recreation-related public fatality rate by 50% from the baseline rate, by the end of fiscal year 2009. Based on this guidance, Vicksburg District's objective is to have no more than three water-related fatalities in fiscal year 2008 and two in fiscal year 2009. Projects are encouraged to use the methods identified by the HQUSACE Water Safety Team, as listed on the Natural Resources Management Gateway and continue to discover innovative ways to achieve our safety campaign goals and objectives.

## **Appendix A – FY 2008 Vicksburg District Water Safety Initiatives**

- Perform two Water Safety Saturation Weekends, 17-18 May 2008 DeGray Lake and Sardis Lake, date to be determined later. The Louisiana Field Office personnel will participate in the annual Northwest Louisiana Water Safety event during the weekend of 17-18 May 2008, “Kick-Off” of the National Safe Boating Week.
- Grenada Lake’s , “Thunder on Water” and various other boating/water safety events at lakes, have “Bobber the Water Safety Dog” materials, perform puppet shows, hold competitions for throw bag throwing and provide water safety briefs.
- Identify additional areas for establishing new life jacket loaner programs.
- Increase personal contacts of Rangers with Public to promote water safety messages on a “face to face” personal contact.
- Continue the lifejacket exchange program.
- Prepare Public Service Announcements featuring the lake’s Park Rangers providing a Water Safety Message.
- Refresh the painted Life Jackets with “wear it” message at the lake’s boat ramps.
- Have children paint signs on water safety themes and place them at boat ramps.
- Maintain signs at boat ramps with “72 people have died on this lake since it was constructed. Please don’t be number 73. A life jacket won’t work if you don’t wear it.”
- Construct billboards with Water Safety Messages along major thoroughfares around the lakes.
- Visit local schools with puppet show and various games to bring home water safety themes.
- Pass out water promotional items like frisbees and other items with water safety messages printed on them.

### **Project Specific:**

#### **Grenada Lake:**

- Annual – Actively participate in the Vicksburg District’s Water Safety PDT in an effort to share and exchange ideas, information, and manpower.
- Annual – Water Safety Displays at Grenada Lake Visitor Center
- Annual – Grenada Lake Visitor Center Water Safety Kiosk presents varying water safety messages.
- Annual – Grenada Lake Visitor Center Theater – Age appropriate Water Safety Programs are shown at the theater including the Bobber Cartoons for visiting school and civic groups.
- February, 2008 – Attend Mississippi Fish and Wildlife Expo in Canton, MS. Set-up water safety booth at Corps Exhibit and provide water safety games and materials.

### **Grenada Lake (continued):**

- April 5, 2008 – Set-up Water Safety Booth at Bass Pro Shop’s Youth Fishing Rodeo providing games and water safety information. “Bobber the Water Safety Dog” will visit with the kids.
- April 16 – 19, 2008 – Attend International Boating and Water Safety Summit
- May 3, 2008 – Set-up Water Safety Booth at Cabela’s Crappie USA Tournament Youth Fishing Rodeo providing games and water safety information. Bobber the Water Safety Dog will visit with kids.
- May, 2008 – Park Rangers and “Bobber the Water Safety Dog” will visit area schools providing water safety programs and water safety information (coloring books, etc.)
- May, 2008 – National Safe Boating Week Grenada Lake Park Rangers teach the MS Safe Boating Course. Water Safety PSAs will run on local radio stations during National Safe Boating Week.
- Memorial Weekend – Labor Day Weekend – Grenada Lake Park Rangers provide Beach Safety Demonstrations. Park Rangers will provide reach pole, and throw bag demonstrations. Park Rangers will provide/exchange PFDs for children in need or caught practicing water safety – Wal-Mart Grant.
- Memorial Weekend – Labor Day Weekend – Grenada Lake Park Rangers provide Courtesy Boat Inspections providing a sticker for boats that successfully pass the inspections. Park Rangers will provide/exchange PFDs for children in need or caught practicing water safety – Wal-Mart Grant.
- Memorial Weekend – Labor Day Weekend – Grenada Lake Park Rangers will provide water safety programs and games at Picnic Shelters providing water safety information.
- Memorial Weekend – Labor Day Weekend – Grenada Lake will air their water safety PSAs on local television and radio stations.
- June 14, 2008 – Set-up Water Safety Booth at Grenada Lake’s “Thunder on Water” Youth Fishing Rodeo and Arts and Crafts Show.

### **Enid Lake:**

- Rangers teach Mississippi Boater Education in area schools. Students receive their state boating license.
- Rangers teach water safety courses in area schools, campgrounds and to civic clubs
- Rangers design water safety calendars, buttons, posters, and crayon box covers to be handed out to visiting public, schools and employees
- Rangers hand out water safety drinking bottles and frisbees that promote water safety to the visiting public who are practicing water safety
- Rangers perform courtesy boat inspections. As rangers perform these inspections they handout decals to be placed on the boat. These decals in return let rangers and law enforcement agencies know that this particular boat has been checked for safety equipment.
- Rangers design bulletin boards that promote water safety and other safety issues

according to the season.

**Enid Lake (continued):**

- Rangers perform water safety programs and rescue equipment demonstrations on beaches
- Rangers perform impromptu water safety talks at all picnic shelters, campgrounds, beaches, boat ramps, and any large crowds found in any of the recreation area.
- Rangers design water safety signs, have area school children paint signs and put signs up in recreation areas and at school playground
- Rangers man water safety booths at local fairs, expos, and other events
- Rangers and local students present a water safety float in three local Christmas parades (Water Valley, Batesville, and Charleston)
- Rangers write water safety commercials and actively produce these commercials which involve local visitors and rangers
- Water Safety commercials are presented on local and cable networks in surrounding area. Television and cable networks have agreed to run water safety commercials as much as possible throughout all major holiday weekends.
- Rangers present water safety programs and water safety materials at the Mississippi Wildlife Expo, Sportsman Warehouse Woods and Water, Grenada Lake's Thunder on the Water, Sardis Lake Earth Day Event, and Georgia Pacific Company Safety Day Picnic.
- Face painting and tattoos with water safety messages are a part of the National Hunting and Fishing Day
- Rangers promote National Boating Safety Week with a display at local malls and courtesy boat inspections at ramps and on the lake
- Develop a partnership with the Mississippi Highway Safety Patrol in promoting water safety and highway safety
- U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary is providing courtesy boat inspections at boat ramps and on the lake
- Frisbee give-away to anyone who is practicing water safety. Examples: using the buddy system and wearing a proper fitting lifejacket. Give way items include: water bottles, Frisbees, and floatation citations with food coupons donated by the local restaurants.
- Rangers exchanges PFD's when young children are found utilizing inflatable toys (Floaties) to help them stay afloat while swimming or boating. These exchanges are performed in a professional manner. Rangers explain the dangers of children utilizing inflatable's to the parents, and with the parents permission they exchange U.S. Coast Guard approved PFD's for the inflatable.
- Sponsor Water Safety Awareness Day at lake for area schools.
- Partner with area schools including: North Delta, Strider, Charleston, Coffeerville, and Water Valley. The high school cheerleaders will be throwing miniature footballs with Enid's Water Safety Logo and Water Safety Message Imprinted on the sides of the footballs at home high school football games.
- Rangers perform a water safety puppet show at local schools (Kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades), special events and upon request from other organizations.

## Arkabutla Lake

- Alcohol Ban – possibly the most significant factor to our water safety program is the project wide alcohol ban.
- Ranger teaches Mississippi Boater Education in area schools. Students receive their state boating license.
- Rangers teach water safety courses in area schools, to include Safe Passage, Bobber and Young and Reckless.
- Rangers design water safety buttons, and posters to be handed out to visiting public, schools and employees.
- Rangers hand out water safety drinking cups, can koozies, floatable key chains, water safety towels, and frisbees that promote water safety to the visiting public who are practicing water safety.
- Rangers perform courtesy boat inspections.
- Rangers design bulletin boards that promote water safety and other safety issues according to the season.
- Rangers perform water safety programs and rescue equipment demonstrations on
- Beaches, at campgrounds and civic organizations and churches.
- Rangers perform impromptu water safety talks at all picnic shelters, campgrounds, beaches, boat ramps, and any large crowds found in any of the recreation area.
- Rangers man water safety booths at local fairs, expos, and other events.
- Rangers present water safety programs and water safety materials at the Sportsman Warehouse Woods and Water, Olive Branch Outdoor Education Day, Desoto County Environmental Education and Bass Pro Shop educational events.
- Rangers promote National Boating Safety Week with a display at local malls and courtesy boat inspections at ramps and on the lake.
- Water Safety Promotional Products give-away to anyone who is practicing water safety. Examples: using the buddy system and wearing a proper fitting lifejacket.
- Conduct a coloring contest with every elementary school in Tate and Desoto Counties: Student color a color-by-number water safety message and a winner is selected from each class and the winner is presented a properly fitting lifejacket that has been donated by area businesses. Over 100 lifejackets are given away during this program every year.
- Rangers teach the Spirit of America Youth Boating Education program to students who complete the MS State Boater Education Class. Arkabutla Lake is the only Corps lake that participates in this program.
- Staff maintain (3) billboards that care the water safety message to passing motorist. Two of the billboards are located along Interstate 55.
- The water safety message is aired at a heavily used Malco Theatre in Southaven, MS. The water safety message is viewed by over 170,000 patrons during the summer recreation season.
- Tate and Desoto County Rescue personnel actively patrol the lake and beach area during the three major recreation holidays.
- Ranger serves on the board of directors for the National Water Safety Congress.

- Water safety PSA's are shown during a local TV station outdoor show.

**Sardis Lake:**

- Sardis Lake will continue to provide quality Water Safety Programs in our local schools, during field trips and special events like Conservation Carnivals and RV, Boat and Hunting shows.
- Continue to provide Water Safety talks and demonstrations on our beaches and at our pavilions.
- Continue to post Water Safety Material on all Bulletin Boards around the lake.
- Continue to provide a robust Lake Patrol with emphasis on Boater Safety.
- Continue to monitor and maintain Water Safety Stations on all beaches with reach poles and throw bags.
- This year Sardis will host the Water Safety Blitz June 28 & 29.
- Provide Water Safety slides before and after movies at the Oxford Theater.
- Provide courtesy boat inspections at our ramps and on the water.
- Plan activities for National Safe Boating Week May 17 – 23
- Maintain Water Safety Billboard on Highway 315
- Procure Dolphin Beach Safe containers for Water Safety giveaways
- Bobber the Water Safety Dog costume is on order.
- Participate in the District's Water Safety PDT

**Louisiana Field Office:**

- Partnering with the Aquatic Education Organization in providing Boating and Water Safety to groups at the Cross Lake Fish Hatchery.
- Continue with Water Safety message to visitors at swimming beach and boat ramps.
- Continue with lifejacket inspections at boat ramp with give-a-ways to promote water safety.
- Continue the partnership with Keep Ouachita Parish Beautiful with the anti-litter/water safety message.
- Prepare and execute the Annual Watersweep to be held in September.
- Continue to visit local schools and help participating agencies with Water Safety programs.
- Paint water safety messages on boat ramps.
- Work with local radio stations, including school stations, to air water safety public service announcements.
- Continue with visitations to campers informing them with a water safety message and Bobber coloring books and other handouts for the children.

## **Ouachita Project Management Office:**

### **Area Wide:**

- Bulletin boards at all major boat launching ramps with various water safety messages and posters which are updated frequently.
- During holiday periods, boat ramps are manned by Park Rangers who direct traffic and distribute water safety information traffic permitting.
- Park Rangers do water safety programs both on and off-project throughout the year to bass clubs, civic groups, schools, tackle shows, etc. An emphasis is placed on presenting programs to school groups in the spring.
- Throw bags are at each swimming area, with signs showing proper use; Park Rangers regularly demonstrate such use.
- Perform boat patrols are throughout the year; in summer, patrols are concentrated on weekends and holiday periods.
- Area personnel attend the 2008 National Water Safety Congress Summit.
- A billboard featuring Water Safety Message established on busy Highway 7 which runs by DeGray Lake.
- Water safety messages and songs are played when outside callers are placed on hold on the project-wide phone system.
- Lake personnel will concentrate and saturate lakes before holidays as recommended by the District's Water Safety PDT.
- Local Park Ranger partner with local radio and television stations to record PSA's to be aired during peak recreation periods.
- Area Park Ranger partner with Little Rock District by attending each District's Water Safety PDT to exchange ideas in promoting water safety in the state.

### **Lake Greeson:**

- Maintain permanent signs at each boat ramp indicating the PFD requirement for each boater and a sign prohibiting open alcohol containers while on the lake.
- Throughout the summer, on the local radio station, we have a number of PSA's concerning various water safety related topics (PFD's, boating and alcohol, etc.)
- During the summer, every Friday night in Cowhide Cove Campground, and every Saturday night in Kirby Landing Campground, provide interpretive programs at the amphitheaters, with at least part of the program dedicated to safety (usually water safety).
- Once a month, have a program called "Beach Olympics", which is a very popular program and consists of life jacket relays, throw bag toss, etc.
- Maintain current Life Jacket Loaner Station and identify areas for additional stations.

### **DeGray Lake:**

- Set up annual water safety partnership meeting: The meeting, held in conjunction with National Safe Boating Week, is a combined effort to help make DeGray Lake a safer place to work and visit. Thirty water safety educators and law enforcement officers attend the annual meeting.
- Ranger personnel will once again record water safety public service announcements with Mr. Jerry Westmoreland of the Clark County Broadcasting Inc. Network. The public service announcements will be aired on three stations, reaching five Arkansas counties during National Safe Boating Week and the recreation season.
- In an effort to reach out to all DeGray Lake visitors, the water safety staff has recognized the increased use of the project by Hispanics. This year, Spanish Public Service Announcements will be recorded, covering such water safety messages as using life jackets, utilizing the ‘buddy’ system while swimming and the consequences of using alcohol while boating.
- Maintain Life Jacket Loaner station at the Highway 7 Recreation Area and identify areas additional stations.
- Continue partnering with area movie theaters to provide slides with water safety themes to be used at movie theaters during breaks between movies features.
- The DeGray Lake staff is partnering with the Coast Guard Auxiliary to conduct water safety boat inspections.
- More frequent water safety boat patrols have been initiated during early spring to concentrate on early fishermen and boaters.
- Provide area newspapers articles promoting water safety while visiting area lakes.

### **Lake Ouachita:**

- The Lake Ouachita Ranger Staff remains proactive in its Water Safety efforts by blanketing local schools with water safety programs before the recreation season begins.
- Partner with Entergy and Arkansas Game and Fish Commission for water safety And boating safety campaign with NASCAR driver Mark Martin of Batesville, Arkansas. The campaign includes posters and billboards. There are plans for this to go statewide in 2009 when Little Rock District joins in.
- Staff operates a water safety booth at outdoor shows, state and local fairs.
- Provide Water Safety items to the lake’s visitors to promote positive acts of water safety being performed by the visiting public. These items include T-shirts with a water safety logo, donated by area businesses and items obtained through the Corps’ Water Safety program.
- Maintain Life Jacket loaner stations and identify additional locations for new stations.
- Maintain painted water safety messages on the lake’s boat ramps.
- Partner with area concessionaires to provide water safety education to visitors renting water craft from the marinas.
- Park Rangers perform beach safety programs for the visiting public.

## Appendix B – Vicksburg District Water Related Fatalities and Visitation

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of Fatalities</u>	<u>Visitor Hours</u>	<u>Visits</u>
1997	5	78,770,500	6,564,208
1998	12	76,777,600	6,398,133
1999	10	70,892,500	5,907,708
2000	8	69,148,100	5,762,341
2001	9	65,251,400	5,437,616
2002	2	66,356,400	5,529,700
2003	7	66,582,100	5,548,508
2004	8	65,395,900	5,449,658
2005	4	66,548,200	5,545,683
2006	1	68,799,400	5,733,283
2007	4	70,061,100	5,838,425