

Contests

There is nothing more enjoyable than a good, hard fought victory, in any endeavor. And, members of the Corps of Engineers family are no exception. Why not accommodate our family members with a water safety contest?

During shoreline cleanups it is suggested to have contests between civic groups and others. Of course, this could include Corps of Engineers family folks, also.

Here's a District level idea that can be reduced to individual lakes and can be done during National Safe Boating Week. Start early with the draft plan and obtain approval. January is a good time to start. Send out the first tidbit about 1 May on e-mail. Follow the email with a nice contest flyer and an article in the District newsletter. Gradually build the week's contest until the week itself.

"Build" a goodly number of packets. Include a generic news release about National Safe Boating Week. The National Safe Boating Council's Campaign Packet has sample releases and radio public service announcements to help you. They range from 1) the Week; 2) alcohol; 3) hazards; 4) wearing life jackets; 5) hypothermia; 6) weather; 7) rescuers; 8) small boat operation; and 9) fishing and hunting. Individual lake's probably will localize these releases and add what activities are planned and who and where to call for information. Some radio PSA's are included in this kit.

With news releases and radio PSA's finished, add a specially designed PSA slick (camera-ready art) to the packet. Now you are ready to start the actual "people planning" phase.

If you are the District coordinator, have one Corps of Engineers family "battle" another family, to include all members of the Corps of Engineers operation's division, e.g., representatives from the locks, lakes, power plants, waterways, regulatory offices, etc. You never know the real estate, engineering, and construction folks might give

you a big hand, too. You could have an overall river winner and separate winners. Make sure to get the chiefs involved from the start. They don't want to lose, either.

Here's an example. Let's take the Cumberland River and the Tennessee River in the Nashville District. Everyone who works on the Cumberland is a member of the Cumberland team and those on the Tennessee River are on the Tennessee team. Draw a large scoring board with spaces for each office on each team and place it in a highly visible location.

If you do not have but one river, then create the contest to be lake "against" lake.

Let the field units know what the score is about the last week of May on e-mail. The next week provide another update to get them thinking and so they don't forget the contest. Continue this approach until the contest is complete.

Remember, your contest runs only the first full week of June. However, all pre-Week newspaper articles, during and post-Week coverage count, as long as they are about the Week. In order for the "river team" to get a point (credit), a newspaper clipping is required. Set a cutoff date for all clippings to be in and announce the winner(s). Probably 30 June is the best time.

Make it ultra easy for the person at the lake, as they are busy with other lake activities this time of year. All that is required is to hand-carry the release/slick to the newspaper and talk to their contact there. It is possible for the team to obtain two, three or four or more points from the same newspaper. For example, if the paper printed a pre-Week release, during-piece (maybe the reporter covered and event), and post-Week article (what happened the entire Week), it would be worth three points. You might want to give a half point for each slick or photo printed. Furthermore, let's say the newspaper printed a release each day of the week, ranging from wearing life jackets to drinking on the lake. That could be worth seven points, in addition to the slicks/photos printed.

One good way to gain points is to get the wire services to print your release. This is tough, but with many activities, it is possible AP or UPI might pick it up ... then look out for points.

Word-of-mouth communications is great, also. Let's say you are the District coordinator. When lake representatives call the office, remember to ask, "What's your contest total so far? At first you will probably hear, "What are you talking about?" But as the Week nears, numbers will gradually start climbing. Let them know you will be keeping all the clippings and updating the clipping file as they arrive, but most importantly, you will affix them to large poster boards for the entire District staff to see how much coverage the contest generated. This will have an affect on the contest, too.

If possible, maybe the District Engineer or the Deputy District Engineer or the Operations Chief might go to the winning site and personally congratulate the winning river team. Maybe this person could present a certificate or plaque awarded to the "Best of the Best" at a special cookout. The District newspaper could print the results and also the special awards "cookout."

This will help vault your contest into next year's competition.

Notice, there were no points given to radio and television coverage. While the electronic media coverage is a must, it is nearly impossible to verify. Or, you might have a special electronic media category.

Maybe, the tiebreaker could be the most electronic media coverage sent in, e.g., radio cassette recordings or television videotapes. These will increase your cost, but they will also add to your coverage library for future programs. The boating/fishing enthusiast at the radio or TV station might be of assistance in obtaining coverage and tapes.

There are many other water safety contests that you could create, such as a water safety festival. Other ideas range from boat drag races to entertainment to an 8K run to children's casting contest to fishing tournaments to commercial exhibitors to booths to showing water safety films to water ski shows.

Your festival might also include a ring buoy toss contest, relay races while wearing a life jacket, two-legged running races between buoys, and maybe co-ed beach volleyball.

Seven other water safety contest ideas are: electronic message boards, telephone books, milk cartons, grocery bags, ice bags, telephone directories and billboards. Simply get the teams together and see how many of each they can obtain ... at no cost!

Saving a life is better than hitting the grand slam to win a World Series, or catching the winning touchdown pass at the Super Bowl.

Good luck with your contest.