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THIS MESSAGE COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE!

Lake Shelbyville, April 15, 1999 – Spring is here and the boating season is just around the corner. There are many different kinds of water vessels that are classified as a boat. Whatever kind of water vessel you have whether it is a personal watercraft, bass boat, sailboat, or paddle boat now is the time to clean it up and do any needed maintenance. Polish, brushes, and tools are used to make your water vessel look good and to keep the engine working its best. This is all very important, but equally important is the upkeep and care of your life jacket. Here are some tips from the US Army Corps of Engineers to help you care for your life jacket, so it will care for you if the need arises.

People vary in many ways, as do their water recreating activities. Life jackets must meet your personal needs as well as fit your activity. First, a life jacket must fit you properly. If it is too small, it may not keep you afloat. If it is too large, it may come off of you when you need it the most. One of the most common mistakes that people make when they are wearing a life jacket is that they do not buckle it up or tighten the straps. Buckle it up and pull the straps tight on your life jacket, so that its fit is snug.

Your life jacket must be in good condition and Coast Guard approved. Check the life jacket's material and straps to make sure they are free from rips or tears. If your life jacket is damaged or too small, replace it with a different one. You should never trust your life with something that may not work when needed.

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When you are on or near the water, wear your life jacket at all times. This is a very important thing to remember; if you should ever need it to save your life, you know exactly where it is and you will not have to look for it. In some instances a person may be knocked unconscious when a boating accident occurs and be unable to look for their life jacket, but if they are already wearing it they do not have to worry.

If you are under the age of 13 or know someone who is, you will want to read the next sentence very carefully. Illinois State Law requires that all children under the age of 13 must wear their life jackets at ALL times while the watercraft is in motion.

Here are some other boating laws that might interest you. For all boats under the length of 16 feet you need a life jacket for every person on board. For all boats over the length of 16 feet you need a life jacket for every person on board, plus a throwable floatation device. It is a good idea to have a throwable floatation device on any boat that you use, but the law only requires that you have it on boats over the length of 16 feet. All of your life jackets need to be in good condition, fit the person wearing it, and be Coast Guard approved to meet the standards of these laws.

Remember while you are inspecting your boat this spring to also inspect your life jackets to ensure that they fit properly, are in good condition, and are Coast Guard approved. The Corps of Engineers urges all of its visitors to play it safe while on or near the water and hopes that you have an enjoyable recreation season.