

Improve Boating Safety

by Adam Fields

Temperatures are warming up, the dogwoods are blooming, and people are out and about, enjoying all the lake has to offer. With boating enjoyment comes great responsibility though. Let's make it a goal as a lake to go accident free this year. Here are just a few great ways we can all improve boater safety.

1. Acknowledge other boaters. In addition to it being a friendly gesture, waving and/or signaling to other boats lets them know you see them. When you get that confirmation back, you know they've seen you.
2. Tube in the open areas like the main lake!! NOT Creeks and Tight spaces. Every summer some Dad out there slings his tubing children into a dock on Lake Gaston. Sadly, this has happened many times, often seriously injuring/decapitating people. Another problem with tubing is the inconsistent driving patterns. Think about where other boats may be driving while you're pulling a tuber. For example, fisherman, skiers, joyriders and wakeboarders drive straight, so when you swerve all around in front of other boats that are driving straight; you put your tuber at serious risk. I've had multiple occasions while doing wakeboarding lessons where I've had to stop the boat because people tubing swerved in front of our boat and slung off their tuber.
3. Wake Surf in the open areas like the main lake!! NOT creeks and tight spaces. This is for similar and different reasons. First of all, the wake surf wake gets smaller in shallow water. You want at least 14' of water depth to get the biggest surf wave. Secondly, while making that massive wave, it would be courteous to keep it as far from shore as possible. Thirdly, Wake Surfing also requires some rather strange boat driving patterns. Give yourself and your surfer space to do your thing without swerving in and out of high trafficked areas.
4. Joyride at speeds that make minimal wakes. Like, if you're going to drive slow, slow all the way down to where you don't make a MASSIVE wave! We all love to drive around and look at houses. What is almost comical though, is the way that people drive slow to look at houses, but seem to be driving at that speed that PLOWS that biggest wake.
5. Keep your distance when on a PWC (jet ski). PWC's are fun, fast vessels to enjoy. However, other boaters, especially anyone doing water sports like skiing, wakeboarding, or wake surfing, get scared and annoyed by these water mosquitos. Your waves wreck the calm water we seek and your driving makes us fear for our safety. Twice now I've been in serious situations involving PWC accidents and my wakeboard students. Both times it was the fault of the PWC operators- going too fast in a tight space, too close to other boats. The first time my student was ran over by the PWC and nearly decapitated. They sold their boat, lake house, and don't come here anymore. The second time I saved the not quite dying PWC driver from the water. He lost his leg in the accident.

6. Respect that other people can hear your music. We've all experienced how well sound carries over water. Keep that in mind when you're gossiping loudly on your dock, or driving around the lake blasting tunes from your stereo, that everyone else can hear you too. My take on **TOWER SPEAKERS:**

- If you wear a helmet, try H2O Audio when you ride. You can hear the music well without having to use the tower speakers.
- Tower speakers make your tower really heavy which makes your tower harder to raise/lower.
- Tower speakers are in the way and very easy to whack your head on while moving about your boat.
- So-Gnar Sounds is about to come out with a revolutionary new life vest that has built in speakers, waterproof housing, etc. that lets you jam with your own vest speakers.
- The best riders are too focused on their wakeboarding to listen to music when they ride.



7. Don't drink and ride/ski. If you are going to enjoy adult beverages at the lake, at least get in your wakeboard, surf, ski, whatever rides in before you start! It'll make for a much better sports experience, keep you less likely to get injured, and make you appreciate that frosty beverage even more after the workout.
8. Have a designated driver and boating plan laid out. Drinking and driving is not an option, but you can have alcohol in boats provided everyone is old enough, of course. As simple as having a DD is, I've heard countless stories where people wound up stuck out on a boat, stranded at a random house, or couldn't get home because people were irresponsible about their boating. Think ahead, coordinate your plans, and enjoy sober boating.

Additional resources are available here at Lake Gaston in various forms. For vessel operation instruction and boating advice, come see us for private lessons at AF Wake, in Lizard Creek. We also have a resources page on our website (www.afwake.com) with helpful links. You can also join our local Lake Gaston Water Safety Council, Coast Guard Auxiliary, and other clubs to stay involved.

Happy and Safe Boating to you all!

Adam Fields