

Lack of knowledge makes boating dangerous



By Thomas Peele, Contra Costa Times

Boaters who ignore or don't know basic safety rules cause 88 percent of reported recreational boating accidents in Northern California's waters, a Times analysis of U.S. Coast Guard data shows.

The unforgiving nature of narrow, curving rivers and sloughs, faster and faster boats, reckless behavior and the lack of mandatory boater education in California combine to make the state's inland waterways more dangerous to people in small boats than even the vast Pacific Ocean.

As tens of thousands of boaters flock this month to rivers, remote mountain lakes and reservoirs, and the notoriously dangerous San Joaquin Delta, the data shows that people are often injured or killed in boating accidents that could be prevented with common sense.

"When you have horsepower, particularly on personal watercraft and ski boats, people smell those gas fumes and they lose about 100 IQ points," said Cary Smith, president of the California Boating Safety Officers Association.

Between 1995 and 2004 there were 4,754 reported recreational boating accidents in Northern California and the two Nevada counties on the eastern side of Lake Tahoe, according to data analyzed by the Times. Those accidents claimed 364 lives and injured 3,033 people.

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