

Swimming near docks can be deadly

The fatalities over the weekend of an 11-year-old girl in New Jersey and 19-year-old young man in Ohio are bringing scrutiny to an age-old summer ritual that's common on waterfronts across America: swimming near boat docks.

Initial reports say the youngster died when touching a dock's electrified boatlift, and the Ohio teen died as a result of dangerous electrical current in the water while trying to save his father and family dog that also appeared to be stricken by the electrical current.

The BoatUS Foundation, the boating-safety arm of the nations' largest recreational boat owners group, has some tips to prevent an electrocution tragedy:

- Never swim around boat docks that use electricity.
- Post "no swimming" signs.
- Have a qualified electrician with experience in dock electrical service inspect your private dock annually.
- Install ground-fault protection on your boat and private dock.
- Ask your marina if they have installed ground-fault protection, and if the electrical system is inspected and tested annually-just in case someone falls overboard. No one should ever swim in a marina.
- Periodically test your boat for electrical leakage into the water.

What do you do if you see a distressed person in the water near a boat dock? A drowning victim often looks "playful," while an electric shock drowning victim looks "distressed." It may be difficult, however, to immediately determine either, so play it safe by not jumping in. The first task is to shut off power to the dock at the breaker panel, and if equipped,

disconnect any power cable to the vessel. If power cannot be shut down, follow the “reach, throw, row, but don’t go” mantra by using an oar, boat hook or throw a floatation device to reach the stricken person.