Boat Licenses
Most boats are required to be licensed with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). This includes motorboats, rowboats, canoes and kayaks. Boats with no motors that are nine feet in length or shorter do NOT need to be licensed. Boats are required to display the registration number and validation decal on both sides of the forward half of the craft. Boats used: 1) for duck hunting during the duck season and 2) for harvesting rice during the wild rice harvest season are exempt from licensing. For information on how to obtain a boat license, contact the DNR Registration & Titling Section (651) 296-2316 or toll free (800) 285-2000.

Life Preservers
On all boats, there must be a readily accessible U.S. Coast Guard approved wearable life jacket for each person on board. Non-motorized accessible means that the life jacket can be easily retrieved within a reasonable amount of time in an emergency. Life jackets must be in good condition and of the proper size and type for the person it is intended.

In addition, on boats 16 feet and longer (except canoes and kayaks) there must also be at least one U.S. Coast Guard approved Type IV throwable device immediately available. In most cases this will be a buoyant seat cushion. If someone falls out of the boat or is in trouble in the water, throw the cushion to the person and tell them to hang on to it until they can be rescued.

Children under ten years old must wear a life jacket when on board any boat while it is underway. Underway means not attached to a permanent mooring or tied to a dock.

16 feet or longer except canoes and kayak

Less than 16 feet or any size canoe or kayak

Boat Lights
Boats are required to have lights between sunset and sunrise. Non-motorized boats must carry at least a white light, such as a flashlight, to display in time to avoid a collision with other watercraft. Motorboats, when moving, must have a red and green bow light and a white stern light that is visible from 360 degrees around the boat. If your motorboat is anchored you need to display only the 360-degree light.

Boat Operator Ages
There are age restrictions for children under 18 years old operating motorboats. Please check with the DNR for more information before allowing a child to drive a motorboat.

Tubing
Tubing behind a boat should be done at a slow speed and only good swimmers wearing life jackets should be passengers on the tube. Turns should be made gradually and away from shore, other boats, swim rafts and docks to reduce the chance of a collision. There must be either an observer, or a wide-angle reareview mirror so the boat operator can watch the tubers.

Dams
There are powerful currents near the base of both large and small dams that can trap a person or boat. It is best to stay well away from dams. On the Mississippi River, (except in the lock approach areas) you may not operate your boat closer than 600 feet above nor 150 feet below any dam from Minneapolis to the Iowa border.

Swimming Safety
It is always best to swim at a beach or pool where lifeguards are on duty. Children should receive swimming lessons and also be watched very closely while they are in the water – even if there are lifeguards. Avoid swimming in ponds, rivers and water-filled gravel pits.

Children and Water
Always watch children around water even when they are not swimming – water is fascinating to them and they do not realize it can also be dangerous.

Getting help
In any emergency situation on the water, call 911 immediately. Have a regular phone and describe the problem and where you are. Stay on the line to help emergency responders find you.