



Safe Quiet Lakes - 7.10.20 – Greg Wilkinson

Share the Space

On a Sunday morning in July a collision took place on Lake Muskoka and a man died. Unfortunately for the OPP who are responsible for patrolling our waters, that isn't a shocking report or even that surprising. In fact, three people died in Ontario lakes that weekend and all of those deaths are important to learn from and all of the families involved deserve sympathy and privacy to deal with their loss.

The Lake Muskoka fatality pains me in a particular way. The man who was killed was either rowing or paddling a kayak, two things I often do near our family cottage. Although the investigation is ongoing, media reports indicate he appears to have been killed in a collision with a personal watercraft (PWC), a Jet Ski or SeaDoo. An average kayak weighs less than 20 kilograms; the average PWC close to 400. The potential speed a kayak could sustain with an average paddler is well under 10 kph while many PWC's are capable of traveling over 100 Kph. In a collision that's a serious mismatch.

Our Safe Quiet Lakes Boater's Code appears at boat launches and marinas around our region and the motto for our group is "Share the Space", a reminder that these lakes are multi-use environments. The Boater's Code states that to be safe we need to use PFD's, operate with caution and steer well clear of other boats. And if your boat can travel 10 times as fast and weighs 20 times more than other boats on the water you carry a lot more of the safety burden. To a person in a kayak, someone driving a PWC might as well be riding a rocket, because the outcome of a collision would be the same either way.

This has been an unusual boating season, with the pandemic causing a late start for boating. But industry sources indicate that sales of PWC's have been red hot this year, with these "entry level" boats being snapped up by buyers eager to get out on the water. And it's not surprising that so many Canadians want to get out and enjoy the joy of being on our lakes and rivers after being cooped up and stressed out in isolation.

But the fact that there are a lot of new boaters with brand new PWC's on the water should cause all of us who have the opportunity to influence and educate boaters to look for ways to do more to keep the lakes safe. PWCs that are operated within our Boating Code are fun and safe. But the margin between an uneventful morning paddle and tragedy is mighty slight.

Safe Quiet Lakes - P.O.Box 358, Rosseau, ON - Canada, P0C 1J0

WWW.SAFEQUIET.CA

Paddlers, rowers and swimmers need to remember that they are less visible than larger craft and behave accordingly. And boaters, particularly PWC operators need to be aware that a moment of inattention, boating impaired, or experimenting with speeds or maneuvers beyond their skill level can result in an injury or death for another boater. If you or someone in your family operates a PWC, please take a moment right now to commit to doing everything you can to ensure that everyone on the lake gets home safely at the end of their day of boating.

Share the space. It really doesn't seem that much to ask.