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Staying safe on the water this spring

The Ontario Conservation Officers Association (OCOA) wants to take this opportunity to join with the Canadian Safe Boating Council (CSBC) to encourage everyone to think boating safety this spring. Ontario Conservation Officers will be patrolling Ontario's waterways to both enforce fisheries regulations and to help ensure the safety of recreational boaters and anglers.

Tragically, drowning claims the lives of boaters in Ontario every spring ? and almost all of those deaths are preventable by following these four key pieces of advice:

1. Be prepared ? both you and your vessel

2. Don't drink & boat

3. Wear a lifejacket

4. Be aware of the danger of cold water immersion

?Our members always follow these rules when on patrol,? says OCOA President Joe McCambridge. ?I encourage anyone who goes on the water this May long weekend to take a few minutes to consider their safety before heading out.?

A quick check of your boat's safety equipment will ensure that everything is there if you need it. Prepare yourself for the trip ? check the weather and water conditions and plan your trip accordingly. Leave the alcoholic drinks on shore ? drinking in a boat is not only illegal in most cases in Ontario, it contributes to unnecessary deaths each year. Make sure you have one approved lifejacket or personal flotation device for each person in your boat ? and WEAR your lifejacket. Even the smallest of mistakes when boating early in the season can be fatal ? prepare yourself to survive if you do end up in the water.

?North American Safe Boating Awareness Week runs May 18 ? 24 this year, and is a perfect time to put safety first when planning your fishing trip,? says McCambridge. ?We hope that everyone enjoys a successful start to the summer fishing season ? but that more importantly everyone returns home safely.?

For more information on boating safety, visit the CSBC website at www.csbc.ca, or contact your local conservation officer.