



Fresno County Sheriff's Department

Richard Pierce, Sheriff **April 5, 2006**
News Release

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Fresno County Sheriff's Department Water Safety

The Fresno County Sheriff's Department Boating Enforcement unit is stressing to local fishermen and other recreational users of County waterways to use caution when in and around the water. Rising water levels throughout the area are prompting the Sheriff's Department to remind boaters to wear life jackets and follow other safety procedures when they are near the water. The rain and run off of snow from the Sierras is causing water to run faster and colder than would normally be expected.

The most common users of our waterways during this time of year are fishermen, and they also happen to be some of those most at risk of drowning in accidents. According to the California State Department of Boating and Waterways, about 35 % boating fatalities are fishing related, and about 30% of those accidents take place during the off season of October-April. For the past two years, men have died while fishing in Fresno County during this time of year. In March of 2005 a fisherman drowned at Pine Flat Lake after his fishing boat capsized, then in April of 2005 a fisherman drowned after his fishing vessel was swamped in the San Joaquin River. In May of 2004 a man drowned in Millerton Lake after having fallen overboard while fishing.

Department of Boating and Waterways statistics indicate that more than 80% of boating related deaths are from drowning-many of which might not have happened if the victims had worn life jackets. The Fresno County Sheriff's Department stresses the fact that life jackets are to be considered lifesaving aids and not substitutes for good swimming ability. A whistle attached to each life jacket is also useful for signaling help or getting attention. Due to the increased water levels this year, recreational water users are encouraged to ascertain water levels and conditions prior to launching vessels into County waterways this year. Water levels in the rivers change from day to day as melting snow pack causes varying amounts of water to be released from the dams.

Anyone wishing to receive more information on boating or water safety presentations may contact Sgt. Kathy Curtice at 488-3924. The California State Department of Boating and Waterways also provides online information and assistance at pubin@dbw.ca.gov .