

Weather

> Monitor the local weather forecast before you begin your journey and throughout your trip, Marine Radio Channel 1.

> In the Midwest, storms may emerge abruptly. These storms are often accompanied by strong winds that can easily capsize a small craft. Lightning, heavy rain or hail can turn a pleasant trip into disaster. Watch the sky and be aware of your surroundings for signs of inclement weather.

> High winds create very hazardous conditions and it is best to exit the river as soon as possible. Facing downstream in a crosswind can be dangerous. Always keep your boat straight into or away from the wind (parallel with the wind) as you head toward the shore.

> Carry a portable radio or weather radio and tune it to the National Weather Service for up-to-date forecasts.

> Carry foul weather gear for unexpected storms.

Equipment

“Life jackets float ... you don’t” is something to remember. Life jackets (also referred to as Personal Floatation Devices or PFD’s) do save lives and are the most important piece of safety equipment in your boat. Make sure you follow the boating rules for your state regarding life jackets. Be sure they fit snugly to avoid the PFD coming off if you should accidentally fall in the water. Frayed or damaged PFD’s should be replaced. Smaller children should wear PFD’s made to fit correctly. The U.S. Coast Guard label affixed to the PFD will aid in selecting the appropriate size.

Boats should be equipped with appropriate emergency equipment (i.e., first aid kit, oars or paddles, anchor and 100-200 feet of line or rope).

If your boat capsizes, do not attempt to swim to shore. Stay with the craft until the boat can be safely beached. Remember, hypothermia is a possibility during most of the year. Life jackets help to minimize loss of body heat.

Always carry a change of clothing in a waterproof container. Dry clothes could save your life by preventing hypothermia if the clothes you are wearing become wet. It does not have to be “cold” for hypothermia to strike. Avoid sunburn, wear a wide brimmed hat, long sleeved shirt, long trousers and use sunscreen. Sunscreen alone is not sufficient for long exposure to the sun.

Trip Planning is Essential

Before launching, check your boat for exotic species (i.e., zebra mussel, Eurasian watermilfoil, etc). Signs at launch ramps will provide further instructions.

Boat fuel stations are very limited. There are two dependable fuel dealers that operate on the lower Missouri River; one based near Easley, MO nearly half way across the State of Missouri and the other at St. Joseph. Trip planning is critical to the success of a boating adventure. The goal of our organization is to work with all federal, state and local agencies to provide fuel, mooring, potable water, sanitary sewer, trash, medical, communication, rescue and other basic services for boaters.

Boating and Alcohol

The combination of operating a boat and excessive alcohol is illegal and can prove to be deadly.

> Alcohol impairs judgment and reaction time and decreases your body’s ability to defend itself from hypothermia.

> Alcohol greatly increases the risk of dehydration. If you reach for something to drink on a hot day, water is best.

> Bring along plenty of drinking water. The rule of thumb is one gallon of water per twenty-four hour period per person.

Emergencies

File a float plan - let a reliable person know where you are going, when and where you plan on departing and arriving, your route and other pertinent information that will enable someone to find you. We never plan on accidents but they do happen. Filing and adhering to a float plan will help if emergency personnel need to locate you.

Boaters are advised to carry a marine radio and a cell or satellite phone for emergency communication with the local Sheriff’s office or other emergency response agencies and be familiar with these phone numbers. Cell coverage may not be 100% in rural areas. Have emergency phone numbers handy. If you are in doubt about who to contact, the county sheriff’s office will contact the proper authorities.

Watch for biting insects, poisonous plants and snakes. They can ruin a trip. Have a first-aid kit on board.

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The opportunity and freedom to travel the Missouri River are privileges. Pay attention and make every effort to protect the wildlife and cultural resources along the river. Destroying the vegetation along the river is unsightly and diminishes wildlife habitat. Litter is unsightly and can damage the environment. Practice “Pack It In...Pack It Out”. Show respect for landowners along the river. If everyone practices the simple tips in this brochure, the river environment will last for years to come and can be enjoyed for many, many generations.

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Permits are required for regattas and special events on the river. The U.S. Coast Guard (314-539-3091/ www.usgdboating.org) and the Missouri Water Patrol (573-751-3333 / www.mswp.state.mo.us) should be contacted to obtain these permits.

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Adapted from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Guide to Recreation and Visitor Safety

Boating Safety on the Lower Missouri River

Distributed by:

Missouri Lewis and Clark Public Safety Planning Committee

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- Missouri Department of Public Safety
- Missouri Water Patrol
- Missouri State Highway Patrol
- Missouri State Fire Marshals Office
- Missouri Emergency Management Agency
- Missouri Department of Conservation
- Missouri Department of Natural Resources
- Missouri Department of Agriculture
- Missouri Police Chiefs Association
- Missouri Sheriffs Association
- US Coast Guard
- US Coast Guard Auxiliary
- US Army Corps of Engineers
- US Fish & Wildlife Service
- Civil Air Patrol
- University of Missouri Extension
- Discovery Expedition of St. Charles
- Missouri River Communities Network
- Missouri Lewis and Clark Commission

Background

The Missouri River is strikingly beautiful and many recreational boaters use the river every day. However, the modern Missouri River presents some significant challenges for the unwary boater. The water is swift and, with a big rain, can swell ten feet in elevation overnight. That is not a problem if you keep the boat tied. A tied boat should be checked often if the water is rising.

Avoiding Collisions with Tugs and Barges

It is not necessary to get off the river because a barge is approaching. You should move toward the off channel shore (the inside of a bend) and be alert for rock dikes which are located there. Move as far away from the barge as possible and position the bow of your boat perpendicular to the wake.

Never turn your boat broadside to the wake created by barges and tugs, they can easily swamp a small boat. Remember, barges have the right-of-way.

Pilots of towboats have a blind spot in front of their vessels and it could take a barge and tow up to a 1½ miles to stop. These barges also create extreme turbulence up to ½ mile behind the tow. The strong wake may lift your boat onto the rocks, dikes or other hazards.

Wakes generated by barges can suck under objects including smaller craft so it's best to give them a wide berth. Playing games with this kind of vessel can result in serious injury or even death.

Other Tips

➤ Remember Rule 9 of the Navigation Rules: "A vessel of less than 20 meters in length or a sailing vessel shall not impede the passage of a vessel which can safely navigate only within a narrow channel or fairway."

➤ In narrow waterways and canals, passing a towboat can be especially difficult. One former towboat captain said he'd seen the water level drop as much as a foot as water is pulled into the props. While the phenomenon is a fact of life for towboat captains, it's often a surprise for skippers of small boats. Give the bigger boats a lot of room.

➤ When passing, use your VHF (channel 13) to contact the towboat's operator for instructions.

➤ Know whistle signals. These are much more likely to be given instead of VHF instructions.

➤ Engines break down and a boat that will be operating on any body of water with large boats and current needs a longer anchor rope than a boat that spends its time putting around a shallow lake. Some rivers can be surprisingly deep with strong currents, especially in early spring and summer. Carrying at least a 150' rope with 10' of chain would not be overkill.

➤ If a barge is being pulled by a tug, the barge may be as much as a half-mile astern, connected by a steel cable that may be only a few feet beneath the waves. Always look behind a tug to see if it is pulling a barge.

➤ Avoid sharing locks with large towboats. There have been many instances where a smaller boat was shoved into the lock walls by the giant props. If you're going to share a lock with a large towboat, talk to the captain and lockman before selecting a spot to secure your boat.

River Hazards

The Missouri River is deep in some areas, but other locations may have rock dikes, sandbars and shallow spots. Snags and floating debris also present hazards that may be difficult to see until you are right on top of them. Varying river levels can expose or submerge hazards within a short period of time.

Pay attention to water areas with a slight ripple. This indicates sandbars, dikes or possible hazards close to the surface. Maps and charts may not necessarily show the location of sandbars because they shift with the flow of the river. At locations where the river narrows, or where there are obstacles in the river, tongues of relative glassy water form 'V's downstream of the obstruction.

Rock dikes are numerous below Sioux City, Iowa. There is a possibility of submerged dikes during periods of high water that create a hazard for boaters. The location of these dikes is indicated on river navigation charts, which are available from the Corps of Engineers. A rule of thumb is to stay toward the outside of every bend and the dikes shouldn't give you any trouble.

Navigation Aids

The Missouri River has been channelized from St. Louis, Missouri to Sioux City, Iowa. This channel is maintained at a minimum width and depth for navigational traffic. You will encounter many of the buoys listed below on this stretch. Mile markers (blue with silver numbers) make it easy to track your location; these are placed on the bank you should be favoring. Navigation Markers are not generously provided but you will find them whenever the channel crosses from one side to another. Navigate within these buoys to insure your safety.

➤ Green "can" buoys mark the right side of the navigation channel.

➤ Pointed red "nun" buoys mark the left side of the navigation channel.

➤ Always remember that buoys may be carried off or out of position by swift current or an accumulation of driftwood.

Mooring and Anchoring

★ Never attempt to moor to stationary objects such as dikes and moored barges and never approach these objects from upstream. Swift water flowing over, under and around these objects creates very strong turbulence and undertow currents that may overturn your boat and pull you under.

★ When stopping, make every attempt to turn your boat upstream into the current and cut the throttle to an idle. The throttle setting will vary with the speed of the current. This will hold your boat steady in the water without drifting into obstacles.

★ If you do anchor in the river, pick your anchorage carefully out of the channel and the current.

★ Remember to always use a bowline knot and keep your bow into the wind or current. This will minimize the risk of being swamped by water coming over the transom or back of the boat.

★ A danforth anchor is recommended for river use since it will bite and hold in the sand river bed. The anchor line should be about 200 feet in length, or seven times water depth.

★ Never set an anchor in the fast flowing river channel. The current can pull you under and debris (e.g. logs) floating under the surface can

hook your line and draw you under in an instant. Always carry a knife on board.

★ Don't anchor to submerged obstacles that you can't see. It can be difficult to unhook the anchor from these obstacles.

★ Be sure you can quickly cut or detach the anchor line on your boat if you need to.

★ Always land your boat facing upstream and pull in parallel to the riverbank. If you try to land facing downstream or perpendicular to the bank, the current will pivot the boat to position the bow upstream and parallel to the bank.

★ A two-point tie off should be used to keep the prop out of the rock and prevent its contact with the bank.

★ You always have more control of your boat heading into the current than with the current.

Camping

Never sleep in a drifting boat. If you feel like napping, tie up in a backwater area or nap on the shore. Camp at designated camping sites on public lands. Contact the managing agency for regulations. If you choose to camp elsewhere along the river, you should have permission of the private landowner.

Shoreline ownership varies from State to State. In Nebraska the streambed and all adjacent lands are property of the landowner through which the water flows. In Iowa, public access along the river is limited to the marked high bank. In Missouri, public access is limited to the high water mark within the banks of the river

Swimming

Swimming and tubing on the Missouri is extremely dangerous and is strongly discouraged. A river current normally 3-4 mph can quickly exhaust even the strongest swimmer. Inner tubes should never be used on the river. There's no way to control them in the current and they pose problems with boats and tugs especially on holidays and weekends when recreational traffic peaks.

Never swim in floodwaters, the main river channel, or around structures such as wing dikes or moored barges. Strong currents, drop-offs and hidden obstacles make these areas extremely hazardous to swimmers. Swimmers and waders should always wear a life jacket.