



Great Lakes Boating Federation

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For Immediate Release
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GREAT LAKES BOATERS IN LINE OF FIRE

Four hundred and thirty thousand bullets raining into the water—the estimated number of rounds to be fired each year during the Coast Guard’s live fire exercises—has raised eyebrows around the Great Lakes, especially those of the 4.3 million registered boaters.

The exercises are estimated to deposit as much as 6,900 pounds of lead and 2,800 pounds of copper into the lake each year. A spokesman for the Michigan Environment Council warned, “That’s more lead than the entire state of Michigan and all of its industries and pollution sources emit to surface waters every year.”

The security of our nation is of utmost importance, but great concern lies in safety of the most likely victims: recreational boaters boating near the line of fire. The tests are conducted in 34 permanent live-fire zones, but much danger lies in poor communication and notification of when and where the drills will be conducted. How is the ship to shore radio-ignorant fisherman supposed to know when and where the bullets are flying?

Live fire training has been conducted since the beginning of the year, but surfacing concerns have resulted in a recent suspension of training as the Coast Guard meets with Great Lakes communities to discuss improvements to its training plan.

Great Lakes Boating Federation praises the efforts of the Coast Guard but expressed concerns about boaters’ safety. The Coast Guard proposes no contingency plans for boaters themselves in the event of a terrorist act. What are boaters to do if they’re trapped between the crosshairs of a threatening vessel and the Coast Guard? With machine guns blazing all around, no boater is going to know what to do or be able to listen to instructions given on the spot.

Great Lakes Boating Federation also requests that the Coast Guard reconsider its decision to use the Great Lakes as a firing range. The Army does not use our national parks for “live fire” exercises. Indeed, most citizens would be outraged if the idea was even suggested. This is precisely the type of outrage being expressed by recreational boaters over the Coast Guard’s current war games. Like our national parks, the Great Lakes are a tranquil wilderness offering the citizenry a recreational respite from the stresses of modern urban life. This is simply not the place for 34 live fire zones.

An Emergency Alert System with precautionary education tailored for recreational boaters is absolutely necessary if these live fire exercises are going to continue. Machine guns, live fire zones and terrorist threats are all firsts for recreational boaters. Boaters' safety is of paramount importance, since they can unexpectedly find themselves caught in the line of fire.

While Great Lakes boaters would rather see the Coast Guard using its limited resources to enhance search and rescue operations, if the war games must continue, then every possible measure should be taken to ensure that one of these "live fire exercises" does not turn into a real search and rescue mission.

F.Ned Dikmen
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