

Avoiding Water Related Deaths in Orange Beach

800 words

Rauf Bolden, Orange Beach

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Orange Beach was quick to legislate against short-term rentals, Hemp Shops, Uber and Lyft, but life-saving water safety regulations slipped through the cracks.

Clearly the point of greatest concern is Jet Skis. In late July an 11-year-old girl lost her life when two jet skis collided on Arnica Bay near Bear Point Harbor. Had the girl been issued a life vest designed to "turn unconscious wearers to face-up position," (Type II: Near-Shore Buoyant Vest - <https://www.boaterexam.com/boating-resources/personal-flotation-device-types.aspx>) in my opinion she would still be alive.

Boating accidents are not isolated to the Gulf Coast.

"A Georgia woman died after driving a water scooter at high speed into the shoreline of a lake in northeast Georgia, the state's Department of Natural Resources said, bringing this year's death toll at popular Lake Lanier to 12," according to a report on CNN (<https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/21/us/georgia-woman-death-lake-lanier/index.html>).

Water related deaths happen all summer long and municipalities should look at how they can legislate, ensuring Public Safety where possible, knowing you cannot do anything to prevent a freak accident.

"A father of six has died after a wave struck him on a North Carolina beach and slammed him to the sand, breaking his neck," according to a report on CNN (<https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/21/us/north-carolina-father-wave-killed/index.html>).

Jet Skis are essentially a scooter on the water, having a shallow keel with minimal bite, making it possible for the unit to slip sideways when turning at high speed, possibly colliding into another object with deadly force. A high-speed collision is what happened in the waters off of Bear Point Harbor. Just horsing around cost an 11-year-old girl her life, devastating her family, becoming a death statistic while on vacation in Orange Beach.

Public Safety needs a plan, developed from responsible data and professional input.

I wrote the City of Orange Beach for water-related death statistics from 2017 to the present. They have not responded to my Public Records Request.

"Jet Skis are the most dangerous thing a tourist can do. It is like putting them on a motorcycle that goes 50 miles an hour without brakes. They [tourists] are not accustomed to running them [Jet Skis]. When something goes bad on a Jet Ski it goes very bad, because there is nothing to diminish the collision with another boat or Jet Ski. When I would rent them, we would make sure they [tourists] knew what they were doing. I got out of the Jet Ski rental business because they are dangerous. We were fortunate in my five years of renting Jet Skis we never had an accident," said Michael Terrell, owner of Wallace Boat Rentals in Orange Beach (<http://wallaceboatrentals.com>).

"I was in the water sports business from 1992 to 2012. We are talking today about injury and safety, specifically regarding Jet Ski rental. One of the biggest things about Jet Ski

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rental is nobody wants to regulate them. One idea is to require renters to watch training videos, showing accidents and injuries, getting their attention about the danger, because the biggest problem with Jet Skis is when you let off the throttle you have no steering, and so many people don't know that," said Steve Vrondran, owner of Kayden's Ice Cream in Orange Beach (<https://kaydenscandyfactory.com/>).

Getting all entities like businesses and local government on the same page is hard. I argue for local legislation, requiring Type II Vests when operating Jet Skis in Orange Beach's jurisdiction, protecting family members from being face down in the water after an accident.

Knowing this is an uphill legislative battle is an understatement, remembering how hard it was to get motorcyclist to wear helmets. Finally, lawmakers realized helmets for motorcycles and seat belts in cars save lives.

Several people argue we are over regulated already in Orange Beach, interfering with what fish to catch, interfering with renting residential properties, interfering with what kind of business I can have selling CBD oil, even though anyone can drive to Gulf Shores and pick up a vial from The Original David's Gallery (<http://davidsgallery.com/cbd-oils>). I respectfully suggest an Ordinance, directly linked to saving lives.

Crafting a local law requiring operators of Jet Skis to wear Type II Life Vests is vital, essentially increasing public safety on the water. This is the right kind of regulation for Orange Beach.

ENDS.

Rauf Bolden is retired IT Director at the City of Orange Beach, presently pursuing his dream as a Web Technologies Consultant on the Beach Road. He can be reached by email: publisher@velvetillusion.com.

Disclosure: The views, thoughts, and opinions expressed in the text belong solely to the author.