



## **Joint Statement from Canadian / U.S. Coast Guard Leadership regarding the Port Huron Float Down 2019**

The annual Port Huron Float Down is scheduled to take place on Sunday, August 18, 2019 on the St. Clair River. This remains an unsanctioned marine event and poses risks to the participants and other users of the waterways during the 7.5 mile /12 km course. The fast-moving current, large number of participants, lack of lifejackets, alcohol consumption, potentially challenging weather conditions, water temperature, and limited rescue resources can create difficult emergency response scenarios that can result in serious injuries or fatalities.

The marine environment – motion, sun, wind, spray – accelerates the effects of alcohol consumption. Alcohol can also increase fatigue and susceptibility to the effects of cold water – further impairing a person's judgment, vision, and reaction time.

Water temperatures during recent Float Downs averaged in the high 60s ° F/ 17-19 ° C. Immersion in water below approximately 70 degrees ° F/ 21 ° C can lead to hypothermia that impairs physical performance and degrades a person's ability to self-help or swim. Early signs of hypothermia include shivering and loss of coordination and judgment.

In 2014, a 19-year-old, experienced swimmer drowned during the event. The U.S. Coast Guard and local, state and federal partners including the Canadian Coast Guard mounted a significant search and rescue effort that was eventually suspended after 21 searches lasting more than 36 hours.

In 2016, high winds and a heavy downpour led to approximately 1500 participants requiring assistance when they landed on the Canadian shoreline at Sarnia and Corunna, leaving them stranded, subject to Canadian and U.S. border security and, often without identification, money and means of communication. Some had injuries and were suffering from hypothermia.

This is an inherently dangerous activity, especially for minors. As first responders, the U.S. Coast Guard and the Canadian Coast Guard recommend that people do not take part in this event. Participants are strongly encouraged to take several precautions:

- Regardless of age or ability to swim, all participants are encouraged to wear an appropriately sized, U.S. Coast Guard / Canadian approved personal flotation device or life jacket at all times;
- Bring waterproof bags for personal items and identification;
- File a "Float Plan" with someone not participating who can report intentions to the Coast Guard in the event participants do not check-in at the scheduled time;

- Never go alone. Use the buddy system, keep an eye on each other, and immediately report incidents of distress to the nearest first response agency representative;
- Refrain from consuming alcohol;
- Dress appropriately for the weather and cold water. Use a raft that limits immersion in the water and can be controlled with oars or paddles; and
- Stay near shore and remain out of the navigation channel.

The U.S. and Canadian coast guards, supported by a large number of federal, state, provincial, and local agencies, are highly trained professionals with limited resources; we embrace that responsibility, but we – as other first responders – cannot be everywhere. We rely on family members and all users of the marine environment to look out for one another, take care of themselves, wear lifejackets and not drink alcohol while on the water to improve the likelihood that they return home safely.



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