

Enjoy Our Waters Safely!

Water Safety Committee 2021 Post-Season Survey Results

The Water Safety Committee for Manitowish Waters conducted a 2021 post-season survey in October for the second straight year. We received 136 responses (95 from summer residents, 40 from visitors and one non-response to the question), down from 175 total responses last year.

“First, I would like to thank everyone who responded to this year’s survey,” said Bob Becker, town supervisor and chair of the Water Safety Committee. “The committee is analyzing the results, including the 59 write-in comments. We will be emphasizing on-water courtesy in our educational efforts for our next season. We will share more about our 2022 areas of focus with the community next spring.”

The responses for the 2021 survey were generally very similar to the responses we received in 2020, so there were no real surprises this year.

Once again, respondents generally feel that our waters are safe, with 74% strongly agreeing or agreeing that they are safe. About half of respondents (52%) did not witness a serious safety violation on our waters last season, and only 43% of you were informed by others about serious safety violations this past season. And, half of you (50%) believe that water safety improved over the previous year, with 26% having no opinion on water safety improvement and 24% strongly disagreeing or disagreeing.

In looking at the reasons for increased perceptions of water safety, 81% of you strongly agree or agree that an increased police presence improves water safety. Increased water safety enforcement (stops, warnings and citations) led 78% of you to strongly agree or agree that it had an impact on water safety. Finally, 85% of respondents strongly agree or agree that increased education improves water safety.

Looking at our water safety officers, 21% of you had contact with them, with 70% of you seeing them as professional and courteous (with 27% of you having no opinion or responding not applicable). Do they do a good job educating the public on applicable laws? Nearly half (48%) strongly agree or agree that they do, with 43% of you having no opinion or responded not applicable.

In terms of **having greater** water safety patrol presence next season, just under half (46%) believe that we should, with 38% saying that you strongly disagree or disagree that we should **have greater** presence (16% had no opinion). On the flip side, only 8% of you strongly agree or agree that we should **have less** water safety patrol presence next season, while 75% of you strongly disagree or disagree that we need less water safety patrol presence next season.

From an educational standpoint, 58% of you believe we need greater education next year, with 36% having no opinion and only 6% saying we do not need increased education.

We are split on knowing how to report a violation or safety issue, with 46% strongly agreeing or agreeing that you are aware of how to make a report and 45% strongly disagreeing or disagreeing that you know how to file a report. We also asked if the current reporting system with the Vilas County Sheriff's dispatch center is adequate. Only 30% strongly agree or agree that it is adequate, and 20% strongly disagree or disagree. Perhaps more telling, 50% of respondents had no opinion. While we will focus on this in the spring, for the record, you can dial 911 for true on-water emergencies, but for non-emergencies, you can call the Vilas County Sheriff's dispatch center at 715-479-4441.

A very strong 98% of you believe that you know exactly what "no wake" speed means. Just like last year, judging by the comments you provided, understanding "slow, no wake" speed remains one of our greatest challenges. While we may feel strongly that we understand that "slow, no wake" speed means traveling at the slowest speed possible while maintaining steerage, the practical application of the term can be challenging to pin down when left to individual interpretation. We are again asking our officers to focus on educating around "slow, no wake" speeds, with only very clear violations warranting warnings or fines. We also encourage our residents and guests to take a like view toward *perceived* "slow, no wake" violations.

Finally, our water safety patrol had 3,918 on-water contacts last season, with 308 verbal warnings, 53 written warnings and nine citations over about 400 patrol hours.

Again, we want thank all who completed the survey. The water safety committee will use the results as we continue to focus on our enforcement and education efforts. For any questions on the survey, please contact Frank DiLeonardi at fdileonardi@icloud.com.

The MW Water Safety Committee

Bob Becker (chair), Spider Lake

Frank DiLeonardi, Stone Lake

Carla Hameister, Fawn Lake

Greg Holt, Benson Lake

Lynn Schroeder, Stone Lake

Pat Soler, Little Manitowish Lake

Dan Stella, Little Star Lake