

## Enjoy Our Waters Safely!

### Water Safety Committee 2022 Post-Season Survey Results

For the third straight year, the Water Safety Committee for Manitowish Waters conducted a post-season survey in October. We received 160 responses (94 from summer residents, 65 from visitors and one non-response to the question), up from 136 total responses last year.

"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. "This year we were pleased with the 75 respondents who not only took the time to respond to the survey but also provided additional written comments. Later in this report, you will see our goals and areas of emphasis for the coming season. One thing is certain, we will continue to emphasize on-water courtesy in our educational efforts."

Just as we experienced a year ago, the responses for this past season's survey were generally very similar to the responses we received for the previous season. However, we did see a decrease in the survey's key question regarding the overall safety of our chain. While respondents generally feel that our waters are safe (65% strongly agreeing or agreeing that they are safe), that is 9 percentage points less than the 2021 season (74%).

About half of the respondents (55%) did not witness a serious safety violation on our waters last season, and 50% of you were informed by others about serious safety violations this past season. And, 44% believe that water safety improved over the previous season compared to 50% a year ago, a 6-percentage point decrease.

As for reasons that can create an **increase** in perceptions of water safety, 83% of you strongly agree or agree that an increased police presence improves water safety (81% on the previous survey). Increased water safety enforcement (stops, warnings and citations) led 82% of you to strongly agree or agree that it had an impact on water safety (78% on the previous survey). Finally, 84% of respondents strongly agree or agree that increased education improves water safety (85% on the previous survey).

Looking at our water safety officers, 16% of you had contact with them (21% on the previous survey), with 66% seeing them as professional and courteous (with all other respondents having no opinion or responding not applicable). Do they do a good job educating the public on applicable laws? Nearly half (43%) strongly agree or agree that they do, with 51% of you having no opinion or responded not applicable, and only 4% disagreeing.

In terms of **having greater** water safety patrol presence next season, just over half (54% compared to 46% with the previous survey) believe that we should, with 26% (compared to 38% with the previous survey) saying that you strongly disagree or disagree that we should **have greater** presence (17% had no opinion). On the flip side, only 6% of you strongly agree or agree that we should **have less** water safety

patrol presence next season (8% on the previous survey), while 75% of you strongly disagree or disagree that we need less water safety patrol presence next season, the same as the previous survey's result.

From an educational standpoint, 68% of you believe we need greater education next year (compared to 58% on the previous survey), with 22% having no opinion and only 8% saying we do not need increased education.

On knowing how to report a violation or safety issue, 40% strongly agree or agree that you are aware of how to make a report, and 50% strongly disagree or disagree that you know how to file a report. Last survey, 46% strongly agreed/agreed with 45% strongly disagreed/disagreed. We also asked if the current reporting system with the Vilas County Sheriff's dispatch center is adequate. Only 24% strongly agree or agree that it is adequate (down from 30% previous survey), and 21% strongly disagree or disagree (20% previous survey). Perhaps more telling, 54% of respondents had no opinion (50% previous survey). 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 93% (98% previous survey) 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 similar view toward *perceived* "slow, no wake" violations.

Finally, our water safety patrol had 2,844 on-water contacts last season, with 177 verbal warnings, 46 written warnings and seven citations over about 320 patrol hours.

### **Looking Toward the Coming Season**

Thinking about being on the water right now might seem out of place, but the committee wants to share our focus for the coming boating season.

#### *A New Patrol Boat, A Second Patrol Boat*

The town has approved the purchase of a new patrol boat. Also, the committee made the recommendation and the town board agreed that we will make the necessary updates so that our old boat will stay in service. As a result, you can expect to see **two patrol boats on our waters during typical busy periods**. Our lead patrol officer, Dan Perry, is already busy recruiting to ensure that our boats are staffed appropriately.

#### *Breathalyzer*

Did you know that we added a breathalyzer to our patrol boat in the middle of last season? And, it was used a few times. We just want everyone to be aware that this equipment is on board and in use.

### **Goals for Summer 2023**

Here are our goals for this coming boating season:

- We want to increase our “contacts” with boaters by 10-25%. Note that we are talking about contacts or the moments that our patrol officers engage with those on the water primarily to educate on violations or potential violations; we are not talking about a prescribed increase in citations.
- We will encourage wake boat owners to organize meetings for themselves to better understand “dangerous wakes” and best practices in wake boat operations. You will hear more about this, but feel free to reach out to committee member Carla Hameister at [cbhcpa@charter.net](mailto:cbhcpa@charter.net) if you are a wake boat owner and want to participate. Please note that the committee is concerned about “dangerous wakes” from any boat on our chain, but we are starting these sessions with wake boats given the amount of public discussion on them.
- Last year we experimented with lights on a few of our buoys with the hope for better nighttime navigation. Based on that experience, we have recommended to the town board that we put lights on all buoys. Before we are able to add lights, we must submit an application to the DNR. Stay tuned for updates on if and when we receive approval to make this happen. Also on buoys, we will move the buoys in the channel between Rest and Stone lakes so that they are in the middle of the larger bays within the channel. Finally, we remind everyone that the buoys are GPS-spotted by the DNR and our town staff at the beginning of each season. If you notice that a buoy has been moved during the season, please report it to our town clerk. If you manage to get a photo or video of the perpetrator moving the buoy, with their boat numbers in clear view, all the better. Please know that moving buoys is prohibited, potentially dangerous, and subject to a fine of up to \$500.

Finally, we have decided to include all the comments to the survey we received this year at the end of our report. The committee was impressed with the number of comments and thanks everyone who took the time. We also note that the comments range greatly in their perspectives, and we remind everyone that we are a community of varying views. However, one thing we all should be able to agree on is that we can all **BE COURTEOUS TO EACH OTHER ON OUR WATERS!**

Thank you, and let’s have a great, fun and safe boating season.

#### 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 Solar, Little Manitowish Lake

Dan Stella, Little Star Lake

For any questions on the survey, please contact Frank DiLeonardi at [fdileonardi@icloud.com](mailto:fdileonardi@icloud.com).