

## Lake Safety Tips From Hall County Fire Services

May 31, 2012

There's nothing better than a day at the beach or on the lake. But swimming or boating on a natural body of water, such as Lake Lanier, can be risky. In fact, almost half of all drownings occur in natural water settings, such as lakes, rivers, streams, or oceans.

Hall County just experienced its first drownings of the season. But hopefully they will be the last. Jose Alfredo Benitez, 40, and Carlos Amaya, 14, drowned on April 14, 2012, in the Mountain View Park area of Lake Lanier off Brown's Bridge Road in Gainesville. Amaya was attempting to swim across a cove when he became distressed, and Benitez, Amaya's step-father, tried to rescue him. Both subjects went under the water and disappeared. Their bodies were recovered by Hall County Fire Services rescuers. Last year, 15 people died on Lake Lanier by drowning.

Swimming in a natural body of water, like Lake Lanier, is different from swimming in a pool. There are no resting places, and many times people misjudge the distance to across a cove or to an island in the water. They become tired and distressed, and they are unable to remain above water.

The simple solution: always wear a life jacket when in or on the water. Use a Coast Guard approved Personal Floatation Device (PFD) that is appropriate for the age and weight of the wearer. Jackets should fit snugly around the wearer to prevent them from slipping off.

It does not matter how well someone can swim, life jackets should always be worn while swimming or boating on the lake.

Some swimmers use air-filled or foam toys, such as "noodles", "water wings" or inner-tubes instead of a life jacket. These items are not designed as life-saving devices and should never be used as a replacement for a life jacket.

Alcohol consumption increases the risk of a boating accident or drowning. Avoid drinking alcohol before or during swimming, boating, or water skiing. Never drink alcohol while supervising children.

To be safe at the lake, remember to:

- Know the terrain. Be aware of and avoid drop offs and hidden obstacles.
- Be aware of your surroundings. Know where you are on the lake, and which lake access park you are visiting.
- Use the buddy system. Regardless of your age or ability, always swim with a buddy.
- Know the weather. Storms can come up suddenly and cause boating or swimming mishaps. Strong winds and thunderstorms with lightning strikes are dangerous.

A day at the lake should be a fun and happy time for family and friends. Do not let it be spoiled by tragedy.

For more information, contact Hall County Fire Services at 770-531-6838, or by email at [fireprevention@hallcounty.org](mailto:fireprevention@hallcounty.org).