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## Letter: Prohibit swimming near marinas

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By: Jerry Nelson, Red Wing, The Republican Eagle

To the Editor:

My wife and I have boated in Red Wing for nearly 30 years. During that time, we have made a few river trips to Florida and have stayed at most marinas along the way.

One difference between Red Wing area marinas and other marinas along the Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee and Tombigbee rivers, is that Red Wing marinas do not prohibit swimming.

The danger is not from boats hitting swimmers; it is from stray electric current, which can electrocute. Twelve confirmed swimmer electrocutions occurred in the U.S. last year, and many more deaths reported as drowning were actually electrocutions.

In May 2011, Brian E. Harwick was shocked while swimming out to rescue his dog in Lake Pepin. Harwick died because of a disconnected wire on his boat-lift motor.

Ole Miss Marina moors hundreds of boats. Most of them are over 20 years old and have had many electrical repairs over the years. If there is an electrical fault aboard the boat (and there can be many), and there is a break or poor connection in the green "ground" safety wire on the boat, the shore cord, or the dock-side power source, the "circuit" is broken and current will seek another path to shore or another boat.

When this occurs, a small electric current in the surrounding water will likely paralyze or kill swimmers in the path.

Last summer was hot, which resulted in a lot of swimming in the marinas. Ole Miss often had people swimming from the boat launch to the gas dock and back. This was undoubtedly due to ignorance of the danger.

On March 23, the Hiawatha Valley Sail and Power Squadron hosted a very successful seminar regarding fresh water electrocution. All area marinas were invited to attend, but only Hudson, Lake City, Hanson's Harbor and Treasure Island sent representatives. All other local marinas including Ole Miss, Red Wing Marina, Trenton Island and Bill's Bay chose not to attend.

What can the marina do to prevent tragic deaths?

1. Install signs, and enforce no swimming in the marina. The signs should warn of electrical shock.
2. Encourage boat owners to use a qualified marine electrician.
3. Periodically check every boat shore cord by using a clamp meter (about \$150 from West Marine). It is fast and easy.

The April issue of Boating Magazine has a comprehensive article on marina responsibility in this regard. I am sending copies of this article to all City Council and Harbor Commission members in hopes of bringing this problem to light.

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