



# LAKE MINNETONKA CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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## Licensed Charter Boat Operators Commended for Commitment to Safety

### *Concerns About Unlawful Charter Operations*

*MOUND, Minn.* – A great way to take in all the sights Lake Minnetonka has to offer is to take a cruise on a charter boat. Nineteen (19) charter boats are currently licensed to operate on Lake Minnetonka and they undergo important training and inspection measures to make sure they operate safely and in compliance with state and local regulations. While the Lake Minnetonka Conservation District (LMCD) requires registration and licensing for charter operations, keeping the lake safe is a coordinated effort among several agencies: the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry (MNDOLI), Minnesota Department of Public Safety, Alcohol, and Gambling Enforcement Division, Hennepin County Sheriff's Office (HCSO), and Hennepin County Public Health Department/Environmental Health.

The MNDOLI and HCSO Water Patrol regularly inspect licensed charter boats reviewing safety equipment such as boiler systems, fire extinguishers, and personal floatation devices, in addition to a charter boat training session with LMCD staff. The initial inspections are a great way to ensure boat operators have the necessary safety tools and a basic understanding of how to use them in emergency situations. Maneuvering a boat on water is more challenging than driving a vehicle on land. There are many elements that a boat captain must contend with such as strong winds, slower stop times, and other boaters that may not have the skills or experience on the water. Dave Lawrance, owner of Paradise Charter Cruises, has operated on Lake Minnetonka more than 36 years. He states, "Our cruise captains are always on alert to our surroundings, especially important when the lake is packed with boaters. We all need to work together to keep the lake safe so everyone can have a wonderful experience on Lake Minnetonka."

In recent years, the HCSO Water Patrol has seen an increase in concerns and number of reports regarding unlawful charter operations. Lt. Bill Gottwaldt believes these popup charter operations present safety risks. Without a license or registration, there is no way to verify these unlawful charter operators have the equipment, skills, or tools to operate safely. Efforts are underway to identify, educate, and take enforcement actions if necessary to eliminate these unlawful charter operations.

Some people think starting a charter business is a way to make quick money, but may not understand the risks. Operating without the appropriate licenses and approvals is a misdemeanor and could result in \$1,000 or higher fine and/or jail time. People who knowingly participate in illegal activity could also be prosecuted. LMCD

prosecuting attorney Steve Tallen observes all sorts of scenarios in his position. “I believe most people don’t understand the seriousness of these types of violations, whether or not alcoholic beverages are involved. When an accident or injury occurs, unlawful charter operators can be held personally liable through separate civil liabilities, as well as criminal prosecution.” Insurance companies may not honor claims related to unlawful business operations.

According to LMCD Board Chair Gregg Thomas, “we want everyone to be able to enjoy the lake and these regulations promote safety and minimize nuisances.” While risks cannot be completely eliminated, choosing a licensed charter boat can give a peace of mind that the operation met safety and maintenance requirements through the licensing process. A list of lake amenities, including licensed charter boats and their ports of call, is available on the LMCD website at <https://lmcd.org/the-lake/amenities/>.

For more information, visit [lmcd.org](https://lmcd.org).

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