



June 16, 2011

Ald. Tony Zielinski
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New Harbor Speed Restrictions Promote Safety

Measure for outer harbor boating during special events

A now permanent “no wake” boating ordinance takes effect on Wednesday, June 29 with the opening day of Milwaukee’s Summerfest and the Big Bang fireworks display. The ordinance restricts the speed of boats in the outer harbor during special events such as fireworks displays and air shows, requiring boaters to slow to 5 mph with no wake rules applying two hours before, during and two hours after an event.

Alderman Tony Zielinski (District 14) and Alderman Terry Witkowski (District 13) co-sponsored the ordinance, which seeks to prevent damage and injury when large numbers of boaters in the harbor are tightly anchored near one another to watch festivities. “Boats cruising by generate wakes that can create collisions among boats in the harbor and can endanger property and boaters trying to enjoy our lakefront,” Alderman Zielinski said.

Wayne Happel, spokesperson for the Lake Michigan Yachting Association, the group that helped lobby for the legislation, has said the ordinance reduces hazards to the hundreds of anchored boats affected by the wakes caused by boats racing back to launch ramps trying to be early in line to remove their boats from the water. “The potential for harm can be alleviated with a little patience and this ordinance inspires that patience,” Alderman Zielinski said.

“Fireworks bring out families in boats that range from very small to very large. Smaller boats, often taken to inland lakes, come across new problems and hazards with hundreds of boats in the harbor during fireworks and other events. Restricting speeds to a no wake speed on event days should enhance the enjoyment and safety for everyone,” Alderman Witkowski said.

The Milwaukee Police Department’s harbor patrol will announce this ordinance on marine radio prior to these events and notices to boaters will be distributed at launch ramps.