



Delbert Scott
28th Senate District

MISSOURI SENATE
JEFFERSON CITY

CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 416
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101

**A Weekly Column for the
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**Contact: Debbie Poire
(573) 751-8793**

Promoting Safety On Missouri's Waters

The phrase “drunk driving” is often related to those intoxicated individuals who take their lives — and the lives of others — in their own hands behind the wheel on Missouri roadways. However, this serious problem doesn't just happen on asphalt. According to [Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc.](#), a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of investigative reporting, the Lake of the Ozarks is rated the most dangerous lake in America, and the 3rd most dangerous body of water following the Atlantic Coast and the Colorado River.

In 2007, the [Columbia Daily Tribune](#) reported that the Lake of the Ozarks accounted for more than 70 percent of all drunken boating arrests by the [Missouri State Water Patrol](#), and more than half of all boating accidents statewide (2006). Fifty alcohol related accidents were reported last year, the most in nearly a decade. Ten people lost their lives in 2006. And just days into the 2007 summer season, three individuals lost their lives on this beautiful — but dangerous — body of water. As we approach Missouri's hot summer days, this serious issue must be addressed.

I have filed a bill this session in response to these horrifying statistics, and to help curtail excessive drinking on our state's waters. [Senate Bill 1107](#) would strengthen several regulations relating to watercraft operation in Missouri, primarily with regard to alcohol consumption policies for those operating a watercraft. For example, an individual with a blood alcohol content of .08, rather than the current .10, would commit the crime of operating a vessel with excessive blood alcohol content under my legislation. Lowering the state's legal blood-alcohol content for boaters from .10 to .08 percent would make it the same threshold for Missouri motorists. If you're too drunk to drive on our roadways, you are too drunk to drive on our waters.

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Many provisions in our state’s current law relating to watercraft operation only apply to the Mississippi River, Missouri River and certain lakes. My bill would expand the law to include all Missouri bodies of water in many instances, such as the “negligent operation of a vessel” statute. [Senate Bill 1107](#) would also apply a universal speed limit of 30 mph for watercraft between sunset and sunrise on any body of water as well as toughen the charges of criminal negligence that results in death caused by a person operating a watercraft.

Campaigns are already underway that encourage boaters to designate a sober driver. “Think Before You Sink” is a joint effort by the Lake of the Ozarks Water Safety Council and lawmakers from throughout the lake region who are working to promote boating and water safety. With 55,000 miles of waterways and 1,150 miles of shoreline to patrol, this campaign and legislation filed this year is just a starting point in addressing this serious issue.

The Lake of the Ozarks is one of the Midwest’s top summer getaways, pulling in visitors from major cities in surrounding states. We love our lakes and rivers, and we welcome all to enjoy what Missouri has to offer on the water. But we want the experience to be safe and enjoyable for everyone. We can only do this by acting responsible for our own actions to ensure our safety as well as those around us.

If you have questions or comments about [Senate Bill 1107](#), the [Missouri State Water Patrol](#), or any other issue, please feel free to contact me at 573-751-8793 or by e-mail at: delbertscott@senate.state.mo.us.

Senator Delbert Scott represents the people of Barton, Benton, Cedar, Dallas, Henry, Hickory, Pettis, Polk and St. Clair counties in the Missouri Senate.

