

## APPENDIX 2 - Feedback Letters - Boat Safe Report

### 'The fellow decided to turn right in front of me': New program takes aim at river safety

*Prairie Lily Capt. Mike Steckhan says some close calls bring on the river bring "your heart to your throat."*

Author of the article:

**Jillian Smith**

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SASKATOON, SK--JULY 29/2021 - 0730 News River Safety - Trent Lee, Mason Gordon-Danku, Olivia Caisse and Brooklyn Maxwell are community relations coordinators. They patrol the Meewasin for the Fire Department and Transport Canada and educate people on river safety. Photo taken in Saskatoon, SK on Thursday, July 29, 2021. PHOTO BY MATT SMITH /Saskatoon StarPhoenix

Capt. Mike Steckhan was passing between two bridge piers on the Prairie Lily when he saw the boat carrying a skier.

"The fellow decided to turn right in front of me and then his skier fell off. So right away I'm stuck, going backwards upstream in a flowing river, trying to go backwards, which in a flowing

river you don't have any control moving a stern and between two bridge piers," Steckhan said. "So now suddenly I've gotta worry about 'OK what comes first: the safety of my passengers and my ship or the safety of the ski guy who's in the water?'"

Steckhan says it's close calls such as that one that bring "your heart to your throat."

"The ship is 107 ton gross and it doesn't stop on a dime," he said.

In this case no one was hurt, but Steckhan says he's glad to see the launch of a new program in the city that's aiming to improve river safety. The program is a Transport Canada grant that allowed the Saskatoon Fire Department to hire four community relations co-ordinators.

"Most folks on the river are OK, but you do get a percentage of people, they're out on the river. They're having a good time. They don't realize that they're on a federal waterway and there's rules of the road. They don't realize the effects that they might have on other river users," Steckhan said.

The co-ordinators bike along the riverbank and talk river safety with people.

"It's working quite well with the feedback we're getting. I mean, they've only been out there for two weeks now but they said everybody is really wanting to engage with them and have discussions about river use and they are interested in the safety aspects," said Assistant Fire Chief Yvonne Raymer.

"Right now we really don't know if enforcement is needed or what it would look like in our city so that's where we're just, 'Is enforcement necessary? Is it more public education? Is it more presence by Saskatoon Fire on the water?'"

Steckhan says education is key.

"We see an awful lot of stuff from the wheelhouse of this ship. It's pretty tall. And we're on the river an awful lot in the summer time," he said. "We're concerned for other people too. We're concerned when we see a rowboat or a canoe suddenly dart out in front of a ski boat. We may not personally be involved but we see a lot of it. And it is very concerning because we don't want to see anybody have an accident or have troubles on the river either.

"The vast majority of folks, they're not mean-spirited. They don't intend to do stuff bad, they just have to be educated a bit."

The Saskatoon Police Service does not have a boat to patrol the river, but the service can write tickets.

"Enforcement doesn't have to happen on the river," said Raymer. "You can do enforcement from a safe vantage point."

The fire department does not do enforcement. It steps in when there's an emergency situation. Although it does sometimes patrol and help educate people on the water.

Steckhan says the Prairie Lily is the biggest, heaviest ship that's been on the South Saskatchewan River in well over a century.

"We can't just dodge out of somebody's way if they decide that we should move and they shouldn't," Steckhan said.

"The analogy I use is would you go out and have your go-kart race in the middle of the freeway? You have to be aware. There's all kinds of rules. Common courtesy to extend to other people and we all share the river," he said.

The co-ordinators will be out speaking with people until October 16.





## Prairie River Cruises Ltd.

Date: October 6, 2021  
To: Brooklyn Maxwell, Saskatoon Fire Department  
From: Captain Mike Steckhan, 306-229-4913  
Joan Steckhan, CPA, CMA, 306-229-9424  
Re: Safe Boating Programme Evaluation

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Brooklyn:

Thank you for your request for our thoughts on the Saskatoon Fire Department's Safe Boating Program conducted this summer. First, we would like to applaud Transport Canada for taking on this initiative to support communities looking to improve boater safety, and the Saskatoon Fire Department for advancing this local programme.

We have a number of thoughts we would like to share. As we have considered our responses, we continually have made reference to river user "behaviour". To make our points clearer for you, our references to behaviour include:

- Compliance with rules of the road.
- Safe boating practices like wearing life jackets
- Having proper safety equipment on board vessels.
- Swimming in the river, particularly the navigation channel
- Drinking and boating (both powered and unpowered)
- Lack of consideration for others on the waterway including speeding and waking other vessels.

We would also like to make a clear distinction between personal safety and collective safety. Personal safety suggests failure to comply with good behaviours will negatively affect the individual (no life jacket etc.). Collective safety suggests failure to comply with good behaviours that will negatively affect other river users (waking paddleboards). The majority of the issues on the South Saskatchewan through Saskatoon are collective safety. Without improvement there will be accidents and it is a matter of when, not if, someone dies. The bad behaviours we witness have very serious results.

1. What were some of the issues you were seeing last year or at the beginning of the season? Issues that have been evident for a number of years, including at the beginning of this season affect both personal and collective safety. These include:
  - Seadoos stunting in close proximity to each other and other river users.
  - Waterski and wake boats and their skiers waking other vessels, particularly unpowered ones.

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- Power vessels in the restricted zone south of the Buckwold bridge and outside the designated passageway.
  - Pool toys being used as boats
  - No life jackets and no paddles in many powered vessels
  - Drinking and boating
  - Floating coolers
  - Vessels occupying the navigation channel without yielding right of way.
2. Did you see any improvement by the end of this season? How did usage of the river improve?

Yes, there was marked improvement in behaviour with powered and unpowered vessels by the end of the season. This includes rivers users demonstrating increased situational awareness resulting in more polite behaviour. Specifically, there was less waking of other vessels, less stunting, and although not perfect, and increased awareness of legal right of way.

The improvement may be directly from simply the presence of members of the Saskatoon Fire Department (SFD). While the SFD has no powers of enforcement, many are unaware of that. The sheer volume of seadoos went down, notwithstanding the improved behaviour of those that were there. Having members visible may simply have encouraged those that have poor on-water habits to find more suitable water to play in. We expect the presence of the Saskatoon Police Service bicycle and foot patrols re-enforced the message given by the SFD members.

There was significant media uptake that started with this programme and the SFD's presence. It brought greater media and community awareness to river safety and related issues, well beyond the intent of the programme and the abilities of the SFD. Specifically, there were more questions about the roles of the Saskatoon Police Service and the RCMP. There now appears to be greater community impetus to do more and consider the needs of enforcement bodies. This was a good wake to create!

3. Was there any point of regression in the season?
- No, there was not regression in the season. The sustained presence of the education programme saw consistently positive results.

Of note, there were low water levels this year that may have reduced traffic. That said, there have been other instances of low water levels (2019, for example) and where behaviour was outstandingly poor.

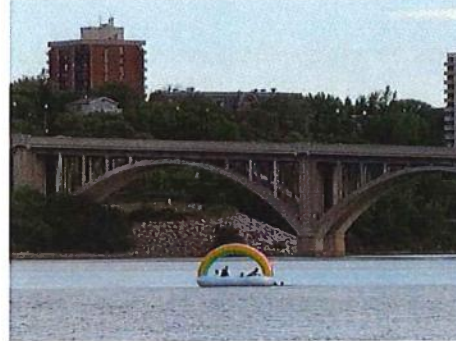
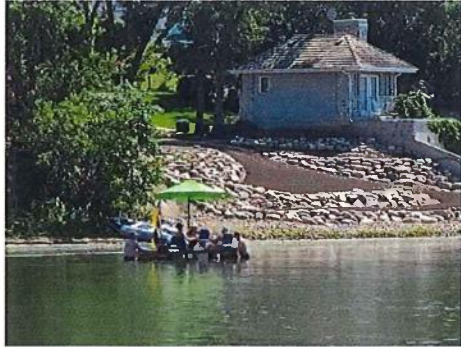
4. What are ways that the Saskatoon Fire Department can better educate users?
- As Saskatoon embarks on better river safety, there are additional items that could help the existing programme:

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- Expand education to the water. While there has been improvement, it appears to be most related to those that can be reached on shore. In the instance of river users putting in upstream of the city limits and floating downstream in pool toys or contraptions, there needs to be a direct connection on water, at the moment, with those users. It is their behaviours that are the worst for personal and collective safety.



- Work with the City of Saskatoon to fulfill their stated desire to place readable, permanent signage on the Buckwold bridge and on the Gordie Howe bridge, indicating the enforceable river restrictions in that area. The current floating signage was and is a community effort paid for by the Saskatoon Canoe Club and our sister company, Inland Marine Technologies Ltd. (IMT). Without visible and instructive information, there will continue to be powered vessels in the non-powered zone being dangerous to non-powered vessel users the restrictions are intended to protect.
  - Commence media awareness programming earlier in the spring and prior to Safe Boating Week. There could, for example, be a build up with the Canoe Club that typically has an open house the first Sunday in May.
  - River User meetings should be re-instituted. At one time the MVA took on this role as an interested party. At the time of their corporate disruptions and by default, the meetings and a River Safety Day were led by community and specifically by Prairie River Cruises Ltd. Volunteers and private businesses such as ours, are not in an ideal position to call groups together. We would help with river user meetings, hosting, connecting etc. but the effort would be enhanced by the Saskatoon Fire Department as a lead partner.
5. Do you have any general comments about improvements that could be made to the river itself for its use?

The river itself is fine, as long as river users behave in a respectful, courteous and safe manner. If that can be achieved, nothing else is necessary.

Thank you for initiative. There has been a difference made in Saskatoon with the SFD members actively talking about river safety. This type of community leadership has been a long time coming and is appreciated. Both our companies, Prairie River Cruises and IMT are prepared to continue to support this initiative and work with the Fire Department as needed and requested.

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## **APPENDIX C**

Stephanie Ritchie  
Saskatoon Canoe Club  
Oct 3rd, 2021

### **1. What were some of the issues you were seeing last year or at the beginning of the season?**

Definitely boats not following the rules at the beginning of the summer, but after the Fire Department came out the rules were obeyed more. We also had issues with kids on the dock not respecting our members and our staff. We came across a couple of times when the kids would be rude towards us and not obey our policy though asked nicely.

### **2. Did you see an improvement by the end of this season? How did the usage of the river improve?**

Yes, with more officers and fire department individuals coming out in the second half of the season I noticed a major difference with how the area was more respected by bypassers/ river users.

### **3. Was there any point of regression in the season?**

I do not believe there was a point of regression throughout the season, things definitely got better. Working alone and closing at night was the only concern I had, though it felt good the fire department came by every once in a while, during the day shifts.

### **4. What are ways that the Saskatoon Fire Department can better educate users?**

It is hard to educate the general public. We are not in school where assemblies are held to inform a mass group of people. For the Fire Department to better educate users, it is important to be where the main concern of problems are. This year, the Fire Department was on land, though it did change things on land and reduce the troubling activity on the river, the impact will be greater if the department was actually on the river. The general public does not respond as well when their actions are only responded with cautionary verbal reminders. When a car is speeding on the road, they receive a ticket especially in a school zone. The water is no different, when a user of the water disobeys the law, where capsizing may occur, their actions should have consequences. To better educate the users of the water, the fire department should be on the water, fine the wrong and build connections.

**5. Do you have any general comments about improvements that could be made to the river itself for its use?**

With different demographics around the river, it is challenging to really better educate and change the lifestyles of those who live around the area. I strongly believe that it is the cities responsibility to take action and provide better services to make the area safer for bypassers and workers. Though, with much sympathy for the people who do hang around the boathouse, a big step the fire department and myself can do is to build relationships with those who may be struggling. Through `out the season when the fire department started to patrol per say, I noticed a difference in the reduced concerning activity.