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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Residents reminded to use caution along Mississippi River

Plenty of hazards when wading, swimming in river especially during floods

MUSCATINE, Iowa – Many would agree that there is nothing better on a hot, sunny day than taking your shoes off and dipping your toes into the cool waters of a river, stream, lake, pond, or swimming pool. But there are hazards even in what appears to be the safest of conditions.

The City of Muscatine issued a reminder to area residents that wading or swimming in the Mississippi River, especially during times of high water, is dangerous and in some cases illegal.

Title III, Chapter 5, Section 9R of the Muscatine City Code states that “Swim, bathe, or wade in any waters or waterways in or adjacent to any park, except in such waters and at such places as are provided therefore and in compliance with such regulations as are permitted by the City of Muscatine.”

In other words, it is illegal to swim in the water in or adjacent to City of Muscatine parks except in designated areas (i.e. the Aquatic Center in Weed Park).

Unintentional drowning is the major concern associated with any water way and with the cold water temperature and swift current of the Mississippi River, a simple slip by the water’s edge could prove disastrous. Disease and other non-life threatening injuries are also a concern.

“People really do not understand how dangerous it is,” Ted Hillard, Battalion Chief with the Muscatine Fire Department, said. “There is a lot of river current. If you don’t know how to swim, are a weak swimmer, or even a strong one and don’t have a life jacket on you could be in trouble.”



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Even in shallow areas the current can knock an individual off of their feet and sweep them downriver into all kinds of trouble or even a strong swimmer who becomes tired can get caught up by the current and unable to escape

And if the river is in flood?

A river in flood has a different nature, is always more dangerous, and the muddier water hides hazards such as fish hooks, broken glass, clams, trees, and miscellaneous rubbish which could cut the skin and cause infection. Some of those trees are just hanging across the water and called a strainer.

“These are very dangerous for boaters, swimmers, and people struggling to save themselves,” Hillard said. “They have branches in the water which just takes you underneath where you become trapped by the current and the branches.”

Hypothermia is another problem.

“The water is extremely cold right now,” Hillard said.

Even if the air is hot and the surface water feels warm, the water underneath that surface remains cold. Hypothermia can set in quickly and disable even the strongest swimmers.

“And don’t forget about the bacteria that is in the water,” Hillard said. “There is plenty of runoff from farms including pesticides that are harmful.”

Hillard added that using the buddy system when around water is a good idea as is wearing life jackets, learning to swim, and just practicing safety.



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The Muscatine Fire Department does have a swift response unit for water rescues but that takes critical time.

“You have to realize that once that alarm goes off, we get the trucks down to the river, transfer men and equipment to the boat, and get out of the harbor, precious time has elapsed,” Hillard said.

A swimming pool, especially one such as the Aquatic Center in Weed Park that is operated by the City of Muscatine Parks and Recreation Department, offers certified lifeguards to protect and help swimmers of all ages. But even here close attention should be paid to safety rules.

The best advice is to use caution, pay attention to those around you, and never swim alone Hillard said.

Additional information can be found at:

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers provides a National Water Safety Program [web site](#) that offers water safety tips for all ages.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources has a section on [boating safety](#).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a section on [unintentional drowning](#).

The American Red Cross Water Safety [information](#) on steps to stay safe around water.

[Water Safety](#): Rivers and Streams courtesy of Recreation.gov