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serves as safety reminder



Sarah Kyle

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An 18-year-old's tubing death is a sober reminder to put safety first when heading out for a day of fun on the Poudre River.

UPDATE: Coroner IDs teen killed in weekend tubing accident

Monday, a single inner tube still bounced against the low-head dam the male teenager and his 16-year-old companion hit while tubing in the Watson Lake area of the Poudre River on Sunday evening.

Less than 24 hours after he fell off his tube, loved ones of the 18-year-old gently tossed flowers into the river before leaving a small memorial at the site near Bellvue. Identities of the males have not been released.

Dozens of emergency crews from Poudre Fire Authority and other area agencies responded Sunday evening to a report of two teenagers who had been swept over a low-head dam near where the river passes under Rist Canyon Road, west of Fort Collins.

One of those teens, the 18-year-old male, fell off his tube and did not survive. His cause of death has not been released.

A 16-year-old male on another inner tube was rescued about 100 yards upstream of where the deceased teenager was recovered. The surviving boy, who was stuck in the dam, was hospitalized at Poudre Valley Hospital but was alert and talking when firefighters rescued him.

The rescue was the first official swiftwater rescue in Poudre Fire Authority's 235-square mile service area for the 2017 season, according to spokeswoman Madeline Noblett. Battalion Chief Brandon Garcia said the rescue and death are a painful reminder of the dangers of the river, particularly hazards such as low-head dams.

Low-head dams are known as "drowning machines" across the country, Garcia said. They're difficult to spot from upstream and create dangerous hydraulics similar to those found inside

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Once over the dam, if the tuber flips, the hydraulics of the water can keep the person in a continuous spin cycle, quickly disorienting the person and making it difficult to swim.

The conditions are dangerous enough that a personal flotation device, such as a life jacket, might not be enough to save you, Garcia added. Neither boy in Sunday's incident was wearing a flotation device.

Garcia said the safest thing to do before tubing, kayaking or rafting on the river is to survey the river to identify an exit point before low-head dams and other hazards and walk around them before continuing down the river. Garcia said there are efforts to get warning signs or buoys in place before low-head dams, but that Colorado currently has no state regulations regarding the dams.

Beyond the hazard posed by fixed structures such as low-head dams, the river is "by no means safe" this time of year, Garcia said. It's cold and it's moving fast — Sunday it was running at just more than 2,000 cubic feet per second at the Poudre Canyon mouth near where the teenagers hit the dam. Water temperature is about 50 degrees.

Hazards such as logs and other debris are changing on a daily basis as spring runoff continues, which can further complicate running the river.

Though the water "seems very inviting" as temperatures in the Fort Collins area warm up, Garcia urged tubers to "leave it to the professionals" for now.

For those who do brave the water, he said it's important to wear proper protective equipment, including shoes, gloves and a flotation device, and to practice safe water habits. That includes a healthy amount of caution.

"Realize when you have the ability to say no or to get out for your own safety, (that) it's OK to get out and walk down the river," Garcia said. "It maybe doesn't work today, and August is a much better time (for tubes)."

Previous reporting from Cassa Niedringhaus contributed to this report.

Water rescue incidents

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2016: 13

2015: 7

2014: 14

2013: 12

2012: 7

2011: 13

2010: 10

2009: 11

Source: Poudre Fire Authority

Water safety tips

Tell someone where you are going and when you plan to return. Take a partner, and put a note with your plans in the driver's side dashboard of your vehicle.

Have a communication plan in the event of an emergency. Not all areas west of Ted's Place have cellphone service.

Wear life jackets around water. Some areas near the water's edge and some riverbanks are unstable due to current high-flow rates. Stay away from riverbanks during times of high-flowing water.

Never forget the power of the river, especially when it is running high and fast from spring runoff or heavy rains.

Be aware of your limitations in the water. Even if you are a good swimmer, fast water, undercurrents and obstacles such as rocks can easily catch you off guard.

Watch your surroundings, including the weather. Be prepared for weather extremes, especially if more rain is predicted. Heavy rains upstream can alter the water flow and depth in a short period of time and contribute to hypothermia. When your clothes are soaking wet, hypothermia is a danger, even in the summer.

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Remember: Reach or Throw, Don't Go. If someone is caught in fast-moving water, reach out to them or throw a rope. Don't go into the water or you might also need rescuing. Call 911 as soon as possible with a detailed location of the incident.

If you lose a tube or other vessel in the river, call non-emergency dispatch at 970-416-2600 to report it and offer a description. This will help emergency responders if they get reports of a missing tube or vessel.

Source: Poudre Fire Authority

Follow Sarah Jane Kyle on Twitter @sarahjanekyle or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/reportersarahjane.