



Deadly Potential at 18 Mile Island

Don Dahl, Assistant Chief - North Oldham Fire Dept

This past weekend North Oldham and Westport Fire Department responded to a call on the “Kentucky side” of 18 Mile island on the Ohio River for an injured woman who had been using a rope swing at the water’s edge and ended up landing in the very shallow water under the rope. Her injuries were severe enough to warrant a lengthy hospitalization and even longer rehabilitation period. She was actually lucky.

Our Emergency Services in Oldham County have responded to this exact same spot several times in the last 8 years and each time the injuries incurred by the person who comes off the rope are serious and usually result in a disability.

In the past we have removed the rope to try to dissuade individuals from trying their luck against gravity only to find that someone within a short period of time will replace the rope.

It is only a matter of time before someone manages to kill themselves in this particular location and the members of both North Oldham and Westport Fire Department would like to ask everyone who uses the river to avoid the temptation when in the area of 18 Mile island and discourage others who might be putting themselves at risk.

The simple mechanics of landing in shallow water (and the mud under it) in almost any position are harmful to the human body and often result in injuries to the spine. This is serious enough but when this type of injury occurs in a remote location and in the water the challenges for emergency service workers are compounded. Just the technique of immobilizing a patient to prevent further injury becomes very complicated when it must be done in water and mud. Despite the fact that the emergency service members who respond (mostly volunteers from your community) are very well trained in how to handle such an event there is time involved, lots of it, and time is something that works against someone with a spinal injury.

Communicating for help when someone gets injured can be a problem with sometimes spotty cell phone coverage. In many cases people who call for help by phone or radio are clueless as to where they are which results in the responding agency having to search to find the injured person. Once emergency services arrive at a scene in many cases we must battle the elements as well as deal with boaters who could care less what their wake is doing to our patient or anyone else on the river.

And finally there is always the “commute” from wherever the incident occurs to someplace where we can get our patient to either an ambulance or helicopter and then on to an appropriate hospital which in many cases will be in downtown Louisville.

The best plan on the river is to avoid ever being injured in the first place. There is a direct relationship between alcohol consumption and either having or causing an injury.

On behalf of all of the emergency service responders who respond to your mishaps I urge everyone on the river to think about what you are doing and what will happen if something goes wrong.

D. A. Dahl