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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**Contact:** Fire Chief Paul Carlyle  
Benton County Fire District No. 4  
509-967-2945  
pcarlyle@bcfd4.org

**Fire officials urge water safety as summer approaches**  
*Simple precautions can prevent drowning and injuries*

WEST RICHLAND, Wash. – With summer around the corner, Benton County Fire District 4 is reminding residents to stay safe while enjoying the area's many waterways, including the Columbia and Yakima Rivers, local ponds, and pools.

Drowning is a leading cause of accidental death in Washington, and local fire officials want the community to take simple precautions that can save lives. Even experienced swimmers can be caught off guard by cold water, strong currents, or hidden debris.

"We want families to enjoy the outdoors, but we also want them to come home safely," said Fire Chief Paul Carlyle.

The department emphasizes the importance of constant supervision around water, especially with children. Swimmers should never go alone – using the buddy system ensures someone is always nearby to help in case of trouble.

Another critical safety reminder: consuming alcohol while near or on the water significantly increases the risk of accidents. Impaired judgment, slowed reaction time, and reduced coordination can turn a fun day into a life-threatening situation. Whether you're swimming, supervising children, or operating a boat, staying sober is a vital way to protect yourself and others.

Residents are also urged to avoid irrigation canals altogether. These man-made channels often look calm but can contain fast currents, steep, slippery sides, and underwater hazards. They are not designed for recreation and are unsafe for swimming or play.

Finally, wearing a life jacket when boating, paddleboarding, or near open water remains one of the most effective ways to prevent drowning. Benton County Fire District 4 is one of several agencies that offers a life jacket loaner program for those who need one. To

arrange a pickup time and location, please call 509-967-2945.

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*Benton County Fire District 4 provides fire and emergency medical service to approximately 25,000 people over 52 square miles. While the service area includes the city of West Richland and its immediate unincorporated areas, BCFD4 is a separate taxing district. BCFD4 firefighters, emergency medical technicians, and paramedics respond to an average of 2,200 calls annually, over two-thirds of which are EMS-related. Visit [www.bcf4.org](http://www.bcf4.org).*