



## **SACRAMENTO COUNTY KID'S DON'T FLOAT PROGRAM**

In 2003, the Sacramento County Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Agency started a 'Kid's Don't Float' life vest loan program along the American River in Sacramento County. This free life vest loan program concept was born in Alaska in 1996 with the intention of raising public awareness, and providing vests to families/ children that could not afford them. At nine different locations along the American River - large signs - conspicuously placed, offer 12 to 15 life vests in various children sizes.

Sacramento County Kid's Don't Float stations are located at: Discovery Park River Access; Discovery Park Boat Ramp; Ancil Hoffman Park; Howe Avenue River Access; Watt Avenue River Access; River Bend Park; Negro Bar State Recreational Area; Lake Natoma Recreational Area; and Folsom Lake Recreational Area at Folsom Point (Dike 8). The life vest stations are inspected and resupplied twice a week. Budget permitting - the program will operate each year from April through October.

The County's Kid's Don't Float Program has been extremely successful. It's common to see all the vests removed from the station and on children down by the water. The following is an example of written and verbal feedback received from citizens in the community:

"I am writing to thank the Sacramento EMS program and to let you know how grateful I am. Last Thursday evening, July 15th, my sister-in-law and I took our children to Discovery Park to enjoy the cool river water and try to "beat the heat". The water didn't look to be too deep, and my sister-in-law even suggested that our children, ages 2, 3, and 5, didn't need life-jackets being that the water appeared to be shallow. We observed several adults who seemed to have water only coming up to their knees. There were also several other young children who were not wearing life-jackets. But I decided to be cautious and put the life-jackets on the children anyhow. After 10 minutes or so, my son, 3, and my nephew, 5, were playing a few feet from shore in water below their knees. My son suddenly seemed to be panicking in the water. My first thoughts were that his cousin had pushed him down (as they tend to play rough at times) and he was panicking from the water in his face. My sister-in-law and I both ran to him with her ahead of me. As I got closer to him, I knew he was in trouble. Just before reaching him, my sister-in-law suddenly plunged under the water. She had run into an area of the river (where my son and nephew were playing) that became very deep with one or two short steps. My son was panicking because he was no longer able to stand on the rivers floor. My sister-in-law was able to grab him and bring him to safety. Without his "borrowed" life-jacket, he may have drowned. My sister-in-law and I were both under the impression that the river bottom would gradually get deeper as you walked out further into the water. We had no idea that the rivers floor could (and does) have sudden drops from shallow water to deep water. I am so thankful that there are life-jackets out there that can be used for the day. I believe that your life-jacket program definitely had a role in saving my son's life. I have heard MANY stories on the media of how so many have drowned in the river. You have probably heard many other stories like mine. But in case you haven't, I thought you might want to hear of an instance where a life was saved."

In the spirit of 'Kid's Don't Float,' on June 10, 2008, the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors adopted the immediate implementation of an ordinance requiring life preservers for access to the public waters within the County Of Sacramento. The ordinance reads in-part, "It is unlawful for any parent to permit his or her child under the age of thirteen (13) in his or her care to access any public waters unless such child is wearing a life preserver." Violation of the ordinance is punishable by a fine of \$500 and/or 6 months in jail.

**KID'S DON'T FLOAT - GIVE THEM SOMETHING THAT WILL**