

Seventeen dead in Missouri after duck boat sinks during thunderstorm

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Rescue divers have finished recovering all the victims in the latest tragic, yet preventable accident, involving an amphibious duck boat in Table Rock Lake, located near Branson, Missouri. Seventeen people, aged 1 to 70 years old, including the driver of the boat, were killed after the boat sank beneath heavy waves.

Authorities finished accounting for the 31 people involved in the criminal disaster Friday morning as divers recovered the final four bodies.

Eyewitness video recordings taken on July 19 shortly after 7:00 p.m. show the boat, “Duck 2,” taking on water as waves crashed aboard and winds whipped up debris during a furious thunderstorm.

Branson, with a population of over 10,000 is part of the Ozarks, located in the southwestern corner of Missouri and is dependent on summer tourism. The city is known for numerous entertainment theaters, wax museums, cave explorations and duck boat tours.

Duck boats are dual-purpose amphibious tour guide vessels, inspired by the DUKW, a modified 6-wheeled amphibious troop and supply carrier, used by the US military in WWII and the Korean War. The duck boat involved in Thursday’s accident was operated by “Ride the Ducks,” a company founded in Branson in 1977, which also currently operates duck tours in Stone Mountain, Georgia and Guam.

Jim Pattison Jr., president of the parent company of Ride the Ducks, Ripley Entertainment, stated to CNN, “The storm came out of nowhere.” Pattison further stated that it was his understanding that, “the water was calm when the boat went out.” In a CBS This Morning interview Friday, Pattison said that “no one was expecting” the storm but the boat “shouldn’t have been in the water if what happened happened.”

The lake where the boat capsized, Table Rock Lake in Taney County, had been under a National Weather

Service (NWS)-issued severe thunderstorm watch since 11:20 a.m.—that is, for over seven hours—a strong indicator that conditions were favorable for severe thunderstorm development.

At 6:32 p.m. the watch was upgraded to a severe thunderstorm warning with Table Rock Lake specifically mentioned in the warning, with 60 miles-per-hour winds reported and hail measuring $\frac{3}{4}$ inch possible.

At 7:02 p.m. the warning was reissued with winds reported exceeding 70 mph. The warning once again included Taney county. By this time the boat was in process of capsizing, with 31 people trapped and desperately trying to escape.

It is unclear as of this writing if life preservers were made available to all the passengers on the capsized vessel. The enclosed amphibious boat, once flipped over, began a rapid descent, plunging to the bottom of the lake. Friday morning, the boat was located by rescue divers, after having rolled on its wheels, resting on the lakebed, 80 feet underwater.

A second duck boat, operated by the same company, was also caught in the storm and barely survived, safely making it ashore. Passengers from the second boat tried to help rescue tourists that had leapt off of Duck 2 as it submerged underwater.

There is no doubt the warnings of impending inclement weather were made readily available to all tour boat operators in the area. The NWS had been tracking the storm system for nearly 10 hours as it moved across the US.

The storm originated in Nebraska and Kansas, with wind gusts reported exceeding 50 miles-per-hour. As the storm moved into Missouri, text messages were delivered via the emergency broadcast network and local television stations broadcast the urgent warnings

across multiple counties. This same storm system produced tornadoes in Iowa earlier Thursday evening.

According to the Ride the Ducks website, July tours leave every 30 minutes from 6:30 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. The tours last for approximately 70 minutes, with half the tour conducted on land and the other half on the lake. Since there were two duck boats from the same company out on the lake, it is obvious that multiple safety warnings were ignored for the sake of ticket sales.

While Jim Pattison claims this is the “first time in over 40 years,” an “accident” like this has occurred within his company, the fact is duck boats have been involved in numerous accidents over the years. The design, half bus-half boat, has proven dangerous for operators, passengers and bystanders. In 1999, 13 people drowned after a duck boat sank in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), which is investigating this latest incident, cited “inadequate maintenance” in the sinking of the *Miss Majestic*. While the military version of the vehicle has an open top, useful if the boat were to capsize, most civilian tour versions are enclosed, usually with glass.

Another safety oversight resulted in a horrific crash in 2015, outside of Seattle, Washington, a Ride the Ducks-branded amphibious passenger vehicle’s front axle broke on Highway 99, causing the vehicle to cross the center line and crash into a coach bus. The crash killed five passengers on the bus and wounded 69 others. In that incident the NTSB ruled, once again, “improper maintenance” and “mechanical failure,” as the cause of the crash.

The city of Boston, in 2016, instituted new safety regulations requiring two operators to be present when operating amphibious passenger vehicles, after two separate incidents resulted in fatalities that same year on Boston roads.

The tragedy on Table Rock Lake has brought the same tired clichés and pleas from government officials. Missouri Governor Mike Parson took to Twitter to offer his sympathies for those killed in the “accident” while imploring for “prayers and support.” US House Representative Bobby Long of Missouri’s 7th district tweeted, “My thoughts and prayers are with the families affected by this tragedy.” President Trump also used the platform to offer his sympathies and implored

that “May God be with you all.”

The warnings issued by the NWS were clear and received, yet 17 people are dead. These preventable tragedies, which occur every day in bourgeois society, are not simply unexpected accidents, as company executives and politicians state, they are the product of an economic system, capitalism, which requires the submission of all societal interests to private profit, including the health and wellbeing of workers on vacation.

While the authorities conduct their limited investigation, “thoughts and prayers” is all that the ruling class is prepared to offer. In order to prevent such incidents from occurring again, the working class must assert its own interests, ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all.



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