Mayor Ron Meer announces new safety measures at Washington Park

Michigan City, IN – Michigan City, Indiana Mayor, Ron Meer, announced on Thursday that the Lakefront Safety Committee is proposing enhanced safety measures at Washington Park Beach and Pier. The Lakefront Safety Committee is comprised of Michigan City First Responders, representatives of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Coast Guard. The proposed enhancements include additional signage, life preserver ring systems, improved safety equipment throughout the park and a public awareness campaign highlighting the potential dangers of Lake Michigan.

“We are often called to Washington Park for rescues, but many of them are at this pier, and unfortunately there have been a number of fatalities,” said Fire Chief Randy Novak. Novak said, “With the recurring incidents at the beach, the pier governmental agencies have come together to formulate the Lakefront Safety Committee and in July of this year received a grant for $13,000 dollars from the Arcelor Mittal Foundation. The committee intends to install twenty-five (25) life rings, each of which having 100 feet of rope tethered to the ring for retrieval, along the East Pier, Millennium Plaza and the south side of the Franklin St. Bridge, as well as along the Trail Creek channel. These life rings can be tossed to struggling swimmers in an emergency. Novak added, "A life ring is one of the easiest ways to save a drowning victim, especially off a pier. We repeatedly warn the public on the dangers of pier jumping, but we continue to see them do it. The new equipment will be an added safety feature.” Novak said the Lakefront Safety Committee will continue to look at best practices in other waterfront communities to ensure the highest level of public safety for the residents and visitors of Michigan City, but emphasized the best method for ensuring the public safety is more outreach to educate the public on the potential dangers of Lake Michigan which will be part of the plan.
Mayor Meer urged the public to heed the existing safety warnings posted at all of the public beaches and to respect Lake Michigan’s powerful currents. Meer called the recent drowning of a 14 year old boy “a tragedy for our community.” Michigan City Parks and Recreation Superintendent, Jeremy Kienitz, urged the public to observe the existing public safety measures that the city has implemented over the past several years including the Green, Yellow and Red flag system that shows swim conditions each day. Flags are posted at the park entrance. Green flags mean swim conditions are favorable. Yellow flags means caution to due elevated levels of bacteria. Red flags means the beach is closed due to unfavorable swim conditions such as rip currents, severe weather, or higher bacteria counts. Kienitz said beachgoers should watch the flags throughout the day because as lake conditions change, the flag warnings can change as well.

In addition, Rip Current warning signs in English and Spanish are posted at access points to beaches and include recommended action for a swimmer if caught in a rip current. The public is asked to read them and familiarize themselves with the procedures. Kienitz praised the lifeguards and first responders who have engaged in multiple rescue efforts this summer and reminded the public that lifeguard hours are limited from Memorial Day – Labor Day / 10 am – 5 pm on weekdays and 10 am – 6 pm on weekends and that the park lifeguards only have jurisdiction to close the swimming area directly in front of the lifeguard tower and stands. Kienitz added that on Red flag days, park staff maintains a presence on the beach by doing walking patrols from the Pier to well past Stop 2. During these walking patrols, lifeguards educate people and explain the dangers of the current lake conditions, and ask people to stay out of the water.