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***** PRESS RELEASE UPDATE *****

Updated 09/22/14 at 4:00 pm

The Sheriff's Office would like to acknowledge and thank College Place Fire Department Volunteer Firefighter/EMT Rick Guse for his assistance in this water rescue. Mr. Guse identified himself to deputies as an EMT and volunteered to help. Mr. Guse was on the WWSO boat with Deputies Greco and Schram and assisted in the rescue of Mr. McCollum. His willingness to help is appreciated.

Original Release

On September 21, 2014, at approximately 5:13 AM, the Walla Walla County Sheriff's Office was notified of a boating collision on the Snake River, about a half mile east of the Ice Harbor Dam. The responding deputies were further advised that a barge had collided into a small pleasure craft. Walla Walla Deputies Richard Schram and Jim Greco launched the Sheriff's vessel and hurried to the scene. Upon arrival, the deputies pulled Robert McCollum, 64, of Kennewick, from the 68 degree water. The two other passengers, both juveniles, were able to swim to shore.

Further investigation revealed that McCollum, his 11 year old grandson and a 16 year old foreign exchange student were night fishing on their 21 foot pontoon boat. McCollum had anchored the boat approximately 20 feet from shore. At some point during the evening the three fell asleep on the boat. Apparently the anchor was not securely fastened to the river bottom and the boat drifted into the shipping lanes of the river. According to McCollum, he was awakened by a loud bang and moments thereafter, was hurled into the water. Both he and the boys were sucked under his boat and the barge before they were able to get to the open air. McCollum called out to the boys, both of whom were swimming to the lighted Walla Walla County shoreline. McCollum started swimming to shore as well, but was beginning to tire. He considered clinging to the pontoon boat; however, he couldn't see it in the darkness. He was rescued by the deputies as he was about 100-150 feet from shore. The two boys made it to shore and all three, though seemingly fine, were subsequently taken to Kennewick for medical evaluation.

September 21, 2014
Walla Walla County Sheriff's Office Press Release
Boat Collision on the Snake River

The Tidewater barge crew were initially unaware of the collision. Upon hearing the radio traffic associated with the incident, the crew returned to the scene for the investigation. During the investigation, it was determined none of the three were wearing safety vests. Further, there was no evidence that the pontoon boat had any visible lighting at the time of the collision. Subsequent to the investigation, the pontoon boat and the related debris were recovered from the river. Everything was brought to shore, where it was removed by a local tow company.

Notifications were made to the U.S. Coast Guard, the Corps of Engineers and the Department of Ecology. A copy of the Sheriff's Office report will be forwarded to the Coast Guard for their review.

