

High water spurs flood of raft accidents

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By Ian Neligh

With higher-than-normal snow melt and rising water levels, Clear Creek has seen its fair share of rafting-related accidents this past week.

According to the Clear Creek Sheriff's Office, from June 5 to June 13, law enforcement responded to at least seven rafting-related accidents in which six people were hospitalized with everything from hypothermia, head trauma and limb injuries to a near-drowning.

Sheriff Don Krueger said that in one incident on June 11, one company had two boats capsize in the creek just west of Idaho Springs, putting about 12 people in the water.

"I think it is just because (the water is) higher and it's nastier," Krueger said. "I think some of the rafting companies have even declined some trips because of the conditions — that's their call. I don't necessarily want to shut down the creek to rafting. If it keeps getting any worse, we might."

The most public of the rafting-related accidents was on June 9, when a 13-year-old girl was found safe after she was swept a half-mile down Clear Creek.

The commercial raft carrying an Arkansas Valley Adventures guide, four adults and two juveniles overturned in the creek, and the teen was swept downstream and was missing for a brief time.

"They just weren't able to dock into their take-out point," said Clear Creek Fire Chief Kelly Babeon. "... They were trying to get out there at Kermit's (Roadhouse), and for some reason they got carried back out into the stream."

The raft flipped over sometime later. Babeon said the guide was able to get all of the raft's occupants but the girl to shore. The teenager was eventually able to get herself out of the water, the Sheriff's Office said.

The Clear Creek Sheriff's Office, Clear Creek Fire Authority and Clear Creek EMS responded to the call at 11:55 a.m. The raft had overturned near mile post 259 on U.S. 6.

"We found her sitting on the bank of the river," Babeon said. "She was actually doing pretty good; she was asking for her mother, but she was doing really well with it."

The girl and the other juvenile were transported by ambulance for medical evaluations to area hospitals.

Black Hawk Fire, Golden Fire, Central City Fire and Evergreen Fire/Rescue also responded.

During the incident, multiple employees from local rafting companies looked for the missing girl.

According to police, after rescue teams arrived, two rafting company employees interfered with the rescue operations.

One of the employees, Ryan Daniel Snodgrass, 28, was arrested on charges of obstructing a rescue specialist and obstructing government operations.

According to police, Snodgrass attempted to cross the stream and bring the teenager to the occupied side of the stream despite being told by law enforcement personnel not to.

“He wasn’t the guide on the trip; he was no more than a spectator who came up and charged into a situation without checking in with anybody,” Krueger said. “You want to bring them across dry if you can — after they’ve been traumatized in that water, you don’t put them back in the water.”

Emergency crews used a rescue boat to bring the girl across the stream.

“If people want to help, fine — but come up and tell us who you are, what you can do and ask if you can help. Don’t just charge in and decide you’re going to do something when everybody else has got a plan made,” Krueger said.

According to Krueger, the Sheriff’s Office was going to meet with area rafting companies on June 14 to discuss the creek’s conditions.

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