

Boating and Alcohol

We all know that driving a car while impaired is illegal and an offense under the Criminal Code. Operating a vessel anywhere in America while impaired is also illegal and is an offense that can result in loss of your DRIVERS license and even land you in jail. Convictions, even for a first offence, can result in heavy punishment.

Besides the legal consequences, mixing alcohol and boating is far more dangerous than most people realize. Fatigue, sun, wind and the motion of the boat dull the senses. Alcohol, coupled with wind, boat noise, vibration, wave action, sun and glare has a tremendous adverse influence on judgment and response time in boating. We know that at least 40% of all power-boating fatality victims had a blood alcohol level above the legal driving limit.

Don't "cruise with booze". It's your responsibility!

Boating and Drinking

Some alcohol facts:

FACT: A boat operator is twice as likely to become impaired by alcohol, drink for drink, as someone sitting in a bar.

The marine environment – motion, vibration, engine noise, sun, wind and spray – accelerates the impairment of the person who is drinking. These stresses cause fatigue that makes a boat operator's coordination, judgment and reaction time decline.

FACT: It is illegal to operate a boat while under the influence of alcohol or drugs (BUI) in every state in the U.S.

The U.S. Coast Guard also enforces a Federal Law that prohibits BUI. This law pertains to all boats, from canoes to large ships, including foreign vessels operating in U.S. waters. In Canada, it is illegal to even have alcohol aboard a boat that does not have a cabin and a separate, closed locker in which to store the alcohol while underway.

FACT: A boat operator with a blood alcohol level above .10% is estimated to be 10 times more likely to die in a boating accident than an operator with a zero blood alcohol concentration.

FACT: Inner ear disturbances - a by-product of alcohol consumption - can make it impossible for an inebriated person, who falls in the water, to distinguish up from down.

There are documented cases where inebriated people, over 6 feet in height, drowned in less than 3 feet of water, due to this fact.

FACT: Alcohol creates a physical sensation of warmth.

This fact may prevent a person in cold water from getting out of the water before

hypothermia sets in.

FACT: Over 60% of all boating fatalities are alcohol related.

Boating and water sports are fun in their own right. Alcohol can turn a great day on the water into the tragedy of a lifetime.

Boating and Alcohol Consumption

Every boater needs to be aware that law enforcement agencies are not turning a blind eye to this problem. Every state in the U.S. has stepped-up patrols to stop BUI in its tracks. With that in mind, take a look at some of these ideas for avoiding a BUI arrest, which could include large fines, jail time, the impoundment of your vessel or all of the above.

Take along a variety of cool drinks, such as sodas, water, ice tea, or non-alcoholic beer.

Bring along plenty of snacks, as we know some of you will drink so don't drink on an empty stomach.

Wear clothing and a hat/cap that will help keep you cool.

Limit your trip to a reasonable time to avoid fatigue. Remember, fatigue is going to occur faster on the water.

If you're going to have a drink, make sure that your boat is tied to a dock, pulled up on shore or anchored. Then, wait a reasonable time (estimated at a minimum of one [1] hour per drink) before operating your boat again.

Finally, spread the word on the dangers of BUI - (Boating Under the Influence). The sober and safe operation of your boat is your legal and personal responsibility.

Boating and the Effects of Alcohol

A National Transportation Safety Board study concluded it takes only a third as much alcohol to impair a boater's balance, judgment and coordination, so having two beers on the water can impair your abilities as much as drinking a six-pack at a backyard barbecue. Many boaters who want to drink have the good sense to stay off the water or let another trained boater drive.

Intoxicated passengers are also a threat in boats. Drunken passengers can lurch and shift suddenly in the boat, push people overboard, fall overboard, throw things or otherwise distract the driver. The effects of alcohol on a person while boating can be devastating. Waterways are second only to highways when it comes to accidental deaths. Alcohol is a major contributing factor in recreational boating casualties.

A boat operator with a blood alcohol concentration above .10 is ten times more likely to be killed in a boating accident than a boater with zero blood alcohol concentration. As previously mentioned, alcohol effects your balance, vision, judgment and coordination. Research has shown that alcohol, combined with boating stressors, such as sun, wind, noise, vibration and motion, can impair a person much faster than alcohol consumption on land. Passengers are also at risk-more than half of all boating fatalities are the result of a boater falling overboard, not operator error.

Drinking alcohol produces certain physiological responses that directly affect the safety of everyone around the water. Such responses include:

Diminished judgment, motor skills, peripheral vision, balance, and the ability to process information.

Slowed reaction and reflexive response time.

Reduced depth perception, night vision and focus.

An inner ear disturbance, which can make it impossible for someone suddenly immersed in water to distinguish up from down.

An accelerated onset of hypothermia, if a person has been consuming alcohol and is immersed in water.

Increased alcohol absorption-for every 18-degree increase in air temperature (above room temperature) the body's absorption rate for alcohol doubles. That means that alcohol is absorbed twice as fast at 93 degrees than at 75 degrees.

Source: USCG

Once Again - Don't "cruise with booze". It's your responsibility!