

NEWS

Oregon State Marine Board
Oregon's Recreational Boating Agency



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Staying Safe on the Waterways this Memorial Day Weekend

"Boat safe, boat sober and always wear a life jacket."

Salem, Ore. - Memorial Day weekend is the unofficial kick-off the boating season in Oregon, and the Oregon State Marine Board wants to remind boaters headed to the water for fun to stay sober, wear a life jacket and be courteous to other boaters.

"With the beautiful weather, people are lured to the water for relaxation and fun" said Ashley Massey, OSMB public affairs specialist. "It happens every year. A fun day turns tragic because of alcohol. It impairs your judgment and you take risks you normally wouldn't. We see a lot of reckless operation and discourteous behavior, not to mention people jumping into freezing water when they are drinking."

The U.S. Coast Guard reports that alcohol use is the leading contributing factor in fatal boating accidents; it was listed as the leading factor in 16% of the deaths according to 2009 statistics.

Alcohol or other substances impair judgment, vision, balance and coordination and the effects are amplified on the water due to the motion of the boat and environmental stressors such as glare, wind and sun — increasing the likelihood of boating accidents and fatalities. And the reality is any amount of alcohol impairs a person to some degree, usually starting with their inhibitions.

In Oregon, a boater is considered legally “under the influence” with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.08 percent or higher. What this means is the boater will automatically lose boating privileges and pay a hefty fine. Marine deputies can still arrest boaters for observed impairment below 0.08 percent BAC, which can still lead to a boating under the influence of intoxicants (BUII) conviction. An impaired boat operator who is arrested for BUII faces fines of up to \$6,250 and/or up to one year in jail, loss of boat operation privileges and suspension of boat registration for up to three years.

“Reckless operation is taken very seriously,” said Massey. “We have to be tough on violators to keep Oregon’s waterways safe for everyone, because innocent people are usually the victims.”

To avoid receiving a BUII citation and to prevent boating accidents and fatalities, the Marine Board offers the following tips:

- Leave alcohol at home or on the shore. Instead, take along a variety of non-alcoholic beverages and plenty of water.
- If you are feeling fatigued, take a break on land and return to the water when you are reenergized and alert.
- If you dock somewhere to eat and choose to drink alcohol with your meal, wait a minimum of one hour for each drink consumed before operating your watercraft.
- Being alcohol-free while onboard is the safest way to enjoy the water. Intoxicated passengers are equally at risk of injury and death.
- Operators and passengers should wear properly fitting personal flotation devices (life jackets). A full description of life jackets can be found at <http://www.boatoregon.com/OSMB/safety/safety.shtml>.
- Take a boating safety course. In Oregon, all boaters must now take a boating safety course and carry a boater education card when operating a powerboat greater than 10 horsepower.

For more information about safe boating in Oregon, contact Ashley Massey, OSMB public affairs specialist, 503.378.2623 or visit www.boatoregon.com

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