



As the weather warms in the Pacific Northwest, many boaters head to the water long before they're prepared. Many boaters, especially those who operate smaller boats (boats less than 21 feet in length) go boating without knowing the safety risks or having essential equipment.

**Our teams are constantly communicating boating safety and the importance of mitigating risks, but there is more that can be done. As members of the media, you can help us get safety messages to the public and prevent tragedies.**

## THE FACTS

**Oregon** experienced **13** fatalities in 2017. The leading causes of fatal accidents were due to operator inattention, whitewater river hydraulics, hazardous conditions and operator inexperience/error.

**Washington** experienced **15** fatalities in 2017. The leading causes of fatal accidents were due to operator inattention, operator inexperience, and impairment (alcohol/drugs). Falling overboard was the leading type of fatal accident; capsizing and person ejected from a vessel followed as leading types of fatal accidents.

2017 Recreational Boating Accident and Fatality Data Oregon and Washington have mandatory education requirements for motorized boaters.	
Washington	Oregon
<p><b>Accidents</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 109 reportable accidents</li> <li>• 62 boaters did not have boating education</li> <li>• 51 reported injuries</li> </ul> <p><b>Fatalities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 recreational boating fatalities</li> <li>• 11 were not wearing life jackets</li> <li>• 7 were in non-motorized boats</li> <li>• 7 were in motorized boats</li> <li>• 1 was a PWC</li> <li>• 8 of the 15 victims were over 50 years of age</li> <li>• 9 were in salt water and 6 were in fresh water – 50/50 lakes/ivers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Accidents</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 64 reportable accidents</li> <li>• 50 boater operators did not have boating education</li> <li>• 17 accidents from collisions</li> <li>• 48 injuries beyond First Aid</li> </ul> <p><b>Fatalities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 13 recreational boating fatalities</li> <li>• 11 were not wearing life jackets</li> <li>• 6 were in non-motorized boats</li> <li>• 6 were in motorized boats</li> <li>• 1 involved a double inner tube</li> <li>• 2 in rivers were wearing life jackets –both involving river hydraulics</li> <li>• 7 of the 13 victims were 50 or older</li> <li>• 9 of the 13 victims were the operators</li> </ul>

# SAFE BOATING PRACTICES

## Be prepared

Planning ahead and adequately preparing the boat and crew (family and friends) prior to departure is critical. Be prepared—that means **be rescue ready**. Plan for the worst, so you can enjoy the best of boating! Failure of the boat owner/operator to adequately plan and prepare can result in prolonged exposure to the elements while awaiting rescue.

- For Washington's equipment preparation checklist and downloadable float plan, visit: [www.boatprepared.org](http://www.boatprepared.org). For Oregon's downloadable float plan, visit: <http://www.oregon.gov/OSMB/forms-library/Pages/Float-Plan.aspx>

## Get educated

Many recreational boaters in [Washington](#) and [Oregon](#) are required by law to complete an approved boating safety education course and carry a Boater Education Card. Even if carrying a card is not required, all boaters are responsible for knowing the laws (federal, state and local ordinances) and keeping themselves and others safe. Taking a boating safety course helps boaters learn foundational knowledge of boating safety, emergency procedures and navigational rules. Whether you own a boat or are renting one—get educated. Passengers on a boat are encouraged to ask the captain about safety protocols, such as how to turn the boat off or make a Mayday call and where rescue equipment is located and how to use the equipment.

- **Washington law** = all boaters between 12 and 63 operating a motorboat with 15 horsepower (or greater) must carry a boater education card.
- **Oregon law** = all boaters 12 and over operating a motorboat over 10 horsepower must carry a boater education card.
- The card is good for life and valid in each other's states, as well as Canada.
- Courses are available online or in the classroom. Oregon and Washington offer equivalency exams for experienced boaters.

## Schedule a Vessel Safety Check

Local marine law enforcement officers, the [U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary](#) and the [United States Power Squadrons](#) have certified vessel examiners who will perform a free "vessel safety check". The purpose is to ensure a boat meets legal standards and has the necessary equipment for emergencies. These checks are conducted at a boat ramp, dockside or at other pre-determined locations and take 15 to 30 minutes, depending on boat size. There is no charge and no consequences for not passing. Rather, boaters are provided with a written report on how to correct any discrepancies. Boats passing the safety check receive a decal (good for the current calendar year) indicating the boat is in full compliance with federal and state boating laws. Learn more and schedule a vessel safety check by visiting [www.cgaux.org/vsc/](http://www.cgaux.org/vsc/).

## Take communication devices

Boaters should carry two forms of communication that will work when wet, such as a sound-producing device like a whistle, waterproof cell phone or marine radio (tune into channel 16). Having these forms of communication will greatly increase chances of being located in the event of an emergency. Day and night visible flares, a signal mirror and a whistle or air horn can also aid emergency responders in their search efforts. Boaters are also encouraged to purchase, register and carry a personal locator beacon (PLB) which will instantly notify responders of their location when activated during a distress situation. It is recommended that boaters research the many options and choose appropriately for the type of boating activity. A VHF marine radio is **strongly recommended** on the Columbia River, coastal bays, the Puget Sound and Pacific Ocean.

## Check the weather

Safe boaters know the importance of understanding weather forecasts and conditions before heading out on the water. **When in doubt, don't go out.** We encourage boaters to take a course that will help increase confidence in understanding weather forecasts. Several organizations offer marine weather classes including local boating clubs, the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and U.S. Power Squadron.

Boaters should check the weather forecast before they go out—every time—and to understand these five **vital checks**:

- **WARNINGS** are the highest priority forecasts, indicating potentially dangerous wind conditions. Winds of more than 21 knots indicate rough conditions for small boats.
- **WEATHER** affects safe boating. Take note of forecasts indicating reduced visibility from fog or rain or risks to safety and comfort from thunderstorms, lightning or squalls.
- **WIND** forecasts are the average wind speed in knots; however, gusts can be up to 40 percent stronger. Plan a trip for best conditions; look at trends in wind speeds and shifts in wind directions over the day.
- **WAVE** forecasts are average wave heights; be prepared for waves of twice the average heights. While out on the water, boaters should note swell and wave conditions and how their boat reacts.
- **TIDES and CURRENTS** are just as vital to check as marine weather. Obstructions may be hidden at high tide and then become exposed and hazardous at low tide. Knowing tide times is very important for boats entering and exiting river entrances and crossing bars

The National Weather Service offers online weather and river information useful for trip planning.

## File a float plan

Telling someone where and when they plan to be out on the water ensure that someone will know where to send help if a boater gets in trouble. Float plans include:

- **Who:** Boater's name and the names of everyone onboard
- **Where:** The planned drop-in spot, route and takeout location.
- **When:** The estimated launch and return times—and when to notify authorities if they don't check-in upon return as scheduled.
- **What to do:** A plan for what to do if they don't return as scheduled.

[Washington](#) and [Oregon](#) have float plans on each of their websites and the U.S. Coast Guard offers a [smartphone app](#) with an option to file a float plan.

## Always wear a life jacket

Drowning is the leading cause of death in nearly 3/4 of boating related fatalities and 83% of those who drowned were not wearing life jackets. [Washington](#) and [Oregon](#) law requires all vessels, including canoes, kayaks and stand-up paddleboards, to have at least one properly fitted U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket for each person onboard. Boaters are encouraged to not only bring a life jacket but to **wear it** every time they go out. Boaters should be prepared to fall in the water at any time, especially on smaller vessels as they're more prone to capsizing. Fortunately, life jackets are much more sophisticated and comfortable and tailored to specific [water activities](#).

- **Washington law:** All children under 13 are required to wear a life jacket on boats less than 19 feet in length, unless in a fully enclosed area.
- **Oregon law:** All children under 13 are required to wear a life jacket when a boat is underway for all boat lengths.

The US Army Corps of Engineers produced award-winning life jacket videos and have social media handles to “Please Wear It.”

- [www.facebook.com/PleaseWearIt](http://www.facebook.com/PleaseWearIt)
- [www.Twitter.com/PleaseWearIt](http://www.Twitter.com/PleaseWearIt)
- [www.Instagram.com/PleaseWearIt](http://www.Instagram.com/PleaseWearIt)

## Avoid alcohol and marijuana

Designate a sober skipper! Boat owners/operators are responsible for the safety and wellbeing of everyone on board. Operating a boat while under the influence of alcohol or drugs is not only unsafe—it’s illegal. Washington and Oregon have laws and penalties for persons suspected and found guilty of operating a vessel while impaired.

- Washington State’s [Boating Under the Influence](http://www.boatsober.org) (BUI) law applies to all boats including kayaks, canoes, rowboats and inflatable fishing rafts. Learn more about boating sober at [www.boatsober.org](http://www.boatsober.org).
- Oregon’s Boating Under the Influence of Intoxicants (BUII) applies to all boats. Any amount of alcohol can impair a person’s ability to operate a boat –whether using oars, human power, or motor. Conviction of BUII means losing boat privileges and paying up to \$6,250 in fines. <https://www.oregonlaws.org/ors/830.325>

## Understand cold-water immersion

The first hot days of the year result in people flocking to rivers and lakes when the water is still very cold. People often think of hypothermia when they think of cold water. However, there are four stages of cold-water immersion and many often die at stage one—cold-water shock.

- Any water under 70 degrees is considered “cold water” and should be treated with caution.
- Most waterways stay below 60 degrees year-round in Washington and Oregon.
- Capsizing and swamping is a high-risk when operating vessels under 21 feet, so boaters (especially paddlecraft users) are encouraged to dress appropriately for floatation and warmth.

**Cold Water Survival**  
If you fall into cold-water, remember 1-10-1

**1** You have one (1) minute to get your breathing under control.

**10** You have about 10 minutes before you begin to lose muscle coordination.

**1** You have about one (1) hour before hypothermia will set in.

**Try not to panic.** The initial cold shock will have you gasping for air and breathing uncontrollably. Keeping afloat and breathing may be difficult but concentrate on just getting your breathing under control. You can expect gasping to pass in about one (1) minute. This is much faster, and easier, if you’re already wearing your life jacket.

During the first 10 minutes you can become incapacitated by the cold-water as your body pushes blood to its core, in an attempt to preserve core temperature. This causes a loss of muscle coordination in your limbs, cramping and quickly makes it impossible to self-rescue or even stay afloat. This is why wearing a life jacket is so important; it helps you stay afloat. Use these 10 minutes to call for help and attempt self-rescue.

A life jacket can increase your survival time in cold water. As your muscles weaken, a life jacket helps keep your head above water. Try to get in a position that protects your armpits and groin areas from losing heat. If you’re with others, huddle together. Make yourself as visible as possible so rescuers can find you.

**WEAR IT Oregon** **WEAR IT** wearitWashington.org

Learn more about the dangers of cold water by visiting [www.coldwatersafety.org](http://www.coldwatersafety.org) or <https://nationalwatersafetycongress.wildapricot.org/Cold-Water-Facts>.

## Situational awareness

Pay attention! Lacking situational awareness and operator inattention is a leading cause of boating collisions. Just like a car, pay attention to what's going on and not a cell phone.

- Keep a sharp lookout for debris, tree stumps, rocks, and other objects in the water.
- Go slow when first heading out. For paddlers, scout the run ahead of time and plan where to put in and take out. Paddlers need to stay near the shore. Motorized boaters need deeper water to operate and the main channel is a freeway. Paddlers should not cross a waterway unless it's "all clear."
- When on ocean beaches or bays, always face the ocean and don't turn your back to it. Intensely strong sneaker waves easily sweep unsuspecting people off their feet. Do not climb on logs, especially if the logs are rolling in the surf.

### Safety At The Beach – Sneaker Waves



**1**

**2** Location of photographer in previous photo

Approximately 80 to 100 feet

**Sneaker Waves** are waves that can surprise beachgoers, running up on a beach significantly farther than other waves including over rocks and jetties

**If you see someone swept into the sea do not swim in after them. Call 911 and keep an eye on them until help arrives!**

**Stay back from the waves and never turn your back on the ocean!**

If your dog is swept into the sea **Don't attempt to save them**, dogs almost always get out on their own, while would be rescuers do not.

**On the beach, rising tides or sneaker waves can easily lift these logs**

**If you are climbing on a log when this happens you could be tossed and the log could roll on top of you trapping you or causing serious injury**

## SAFE BOATING CAMPAIGNS

### Ready, Set, Wear It Events (May 19, June 9, July 7, Aug. 11)

Join safety advocates around the world for family-fun events to heighten awareness of life jackets and go for a world record along the way! All registered events are required to tally how many people (and pets!) attend. The event with the most participants receives a prize package from [National Safe Boating Council!](#)

### Safe Boating Week (May 20-26)

The kick off before Memorial Day. This campaign reminds boaters to make responsible decisions a daily habit, such as always wearing a life jacket, never boating under the influence, carrying the right equipment, knowing navigational rules and more.

## Operation Dry Water (June 29 to July 1)

Help create an awareness of the risks and penalties associated with boating under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Encourage people to designate a sober skipper before going boating. Marine law enforcement conducts heightened emphasis patrols. Learn more at [www.operationdrywater.org/pledge](http://www.operationdrywater.org/pledge).

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## CONTACTS

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**The National Weather Service offers online weather and river information useful for trip planning at the following sites for the state of Washington:**

[www.weather.gov/seattle](http://www.weather.gov/seattle)

[www.weather.gov/portland](http://www.weather.gov/portland)

[www.weather.gov/spokane](http://www.weather.gov/spokane)

[www.weather.gov/pendleton](http://www.weather.gov/pendleton)

