

## **Safe Boating Tips**

**By Eric Dahl, Madison Fire Department**

*Each year, the City of Madison Fire Department Lake Rescue Team and Dane County Sheriff's Office responds to boating crashes and water rescue calls on area lakes. The majority of these incidents could be prevented with basic water safety knowledge and simple actions.*

*The lakes provide a beautiful setting and a great place to enjoy many recreational activities. Please do your part to make this year a safe and fun one on the lakes!*

People who would *never* consider drinking while driving a car down a city street at 40 mph, somehow think it's acceptable to do so while operating a boat. Add in the factor that people have much more experience driving a car than a boat, and you literally have an accident waiting to happen.

**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.

**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.

## **Safe Boating Tips**

1. Take along a variety of cool drinks, such as sodas, water, ice tea, or non-alcoholic beer.
2. Bring along plenty of snacks.
3. Wear clothing and a hat/cap that will help keep you cool.
4. Limit your trip to a reasonable time to avoid fatigue. Remember, fatigue occurs faster on the water.
5. Take a boating safety class offered by your local Power Squadron, Coast Guard Auxiliary or Red Cross.
6. Know your boat's load limit, and don't exceed it. A safe boat is a well-equipped boat. Always carry the necessary safety gear.....and know how to use it.
7. Knowing how to swim just makes good sense if you spend time on the water. If you don't know how, LEARN. However, even good swimmers do not always survive the shock or panic of sudden immersion in cold water.
8. Keep lifejackets visible and accessible.....and never make someone feel uncomfortable if they choose to wear a life jacket.
9. Learn "the rules of the road".....and obey them!
10. Don't overdo your boating fun. In 3 hours of normal boating, the noise, motion, sun, wind and glare can frequently double an individual's reaction time.
11. Remember, while a drink or two can relax you and make your day more enjoyable, they may also slow your reaction time, reduce your coordination, and increase your susceptibility to hypothermia.