

# SCA

small craft advisory

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# INJURY PREVENTION

By Kimberly Hermes

A former state legislator from Alaska survived an icy plunge this spring because he had the forethought to wear his life jacket while boating.

Around 5 p.m. on April 23, 2007, Bruce Weyhrauch, a Juneau attorney, headed out alone on his 14-foot Boston Whaler to do some salmon fishing. Shortly after leaving shore, he slipped on spilled oil, hit his head on the console and rolled overboard. Since the boat was running, he could not get back on board.

Close to 6:30 p.m., another boater spotted Weyhrauch's boat running with no one on board.

Weyhrauch, who was wearing a float coat, spent about an hour in the 42-degree water, paddling toward an island. He spent a rainy night on the island and was found the next morning by the Sea Dogs, a volunteer canine unit under the direction of the Alaska State Troopers.

Coast Guard officials said Weyhrauch almost certainly would have died if he hadn't been wearing a flotation device. Even at that, they are surprised he survived the exposure overnight. Weyhrauch did not spend the night on the beach, where he would have been more visible. He instead opted to stay in the shelter of the woods.

This story illustrates the intrinsic value of injury prevention with regards to recreational boating safety. At the most basic level, injury prevention is anything that is done to prevent injury. And injuries can be prevented – they do not occur at random.

For decades, injuries simply were dismissed as “accidents” that just “happen.” However, the study of injury prevention has provided a new perspective: Injuries are not accidents. While an accident is defined as a happening that is not expected, foreseen or intended, research

has shown that patterns of common variables and risk factors are associated with injury. This means most injuries are predictable and preventable.

## Preventing Injuries in Boating

Injuries have been a leading cause of death and disability throughout history; consequently, many people and agencies have undertaken prevention efforts. So how do we go about predicting and preventing injuries?

A significant factor of injury prevention is knowledge. The Injury Prevention Web ([injuryprevention.org](http://injuryprevention.org)) explains, “To prevent injuries, it is necessary to have information about the factors that contribute to their occurrence. With this information we may understand the options for prevention.” Accordingly, organizations around the globe continue studying boating accidents and what causes them.

For example, the U.S. Coast Guard compiles data annually from all the states and U.S. territories on recreational boating accidents. The information is used to determine what types of accidents are occurring, how frequently they are taking place and how significant the results are, particularly in the form of casualties. By defining the trouble spots, the most effective strategies for preventing injuries can be determined.

## A Spectrum for Safety

Clearly, injury prevention involves more than simply knowing what causes injuries. Larry Cohen and Susan Swift expand on what is needed to prevent injuries in their article, “The Spectrum of Prevention: Developing a Comprehensive Approach to Injury Prevention.” The authors describe a framework for developing multifaceted approaches to injury prevention, which consists of six interrelated action levels:

- (1) strengthening individual knowledge and skills,
- (2) promoting community education,
- (3) educating providers,
- (4) fostering coalitions and networks,
- (5) changing organizational practices, and
- (6) influencing policy and legislation.

For the most part, boating safety professionals do utilize comprehensive approaches to injury prevention and the elements of the Spectrum of Prevention are being employed.

To strengthen individual knowledge and skills, numerous government agencies and private companies offer boating safety education, whether it's through a mini course presented at the local grade school, a formal eight-hour course held at the local fishing club, a safety talk given to civic groups, or even personal contact with boaters on the water. Whatever form this individual education takes, it is crucial to preventing injuries. It is through these encounters that educators reach the people who are out there boating. And helping boaters learn to be safer on the water helps prevent injuries.

To promote community education, many state and local agencies organize events such as boating safety fairs and campaigns. An excellent model is the annual Tri-State Boating Safety Fair. Co-hosted by the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the California Department of Boating and Waterways and the Nevada Department of Wildlife, this event is held each spring to promote safe and knowledgeable recreational boating to those who boat on the Colorado River.



For boaters to benefit from a boating safety course, the course providers must know what to include in their courses. To facilitate this, the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) established national boating education standards more than a decade ago. These standards serve as a guide for state, nonprofit and commercial providers to follow in developing boating education materials.

In addition to covering the right information, the courses must also be presented in an effective and appropriate manner. To help teach the instructors, the National Safe Boating Council (NSBC) periodically holds its Boating Safety Instructor Certification Course. This course educates instructors in NASBLA's *Minimum Standards for Boating Education* and in effective boating education methods.

This program can be viewed as a partnership between NASBLA and the NSBC. This teamwork illustrates how organizations and others foster networks to facilitate injury prevention. A more extensive example of fostering coalitions and networks is the North American Safe Boating Campaign. Working with partner organizations such as NASBLA and the Canadian Safe Boating Council, the NSBC spearheads the North American Safe Boating Campaign each year to spread boating safety messages, encourage boater education and help to save lives.

Another factor in preventing injury is changing organizational policy. According to Cohen and Swift, this involves adopting regulations and shaping norms to improve health and safety. The two authors acknowledge that while this level of the Spectrum has considerable potential, it is usually the least understood and thus the most frequently ignored component. Implementing this component involves



*With approximately 77 million boaters on U.S. waters today, boating professionals continue to seek ways to prevent injuries. A comprehensive approach achieves success because it offers a variety of strategies for improving safety in recreational boating.* Photo courtesy Mustang Survival Corp.

an organization changing its own internal regulations and norms to affect the health and safety of its members.

An example of this in the realm of recreational boating safety is an agency requiring its water patrol officers to wear life jackets while boating. Currently just over 40 states and territories have implemented such a policy. In addition to helping keep officers safer on the job, this requirement also sends a safety message to boaters. If boaters regularly see officers wearing life

jackets and learn from the officers about the new, more comfortable life jacket designs, boaters are likely to be more inclined to wear life jackets themselves.

The final component of the comprehensive approach to injury prevention outlined by the Spectrum is influencing policy and legislation. This concerns changes in local, state and national laws. NASBLA plays an important role in this by drafting model acts and position papers. Through these documents, the nonprofit organization strives to help the states and territories achieve uniformity in their boating-related regulations and statutes.

NASBLA has drafted numerous model acts over the years. Each one serves as a tool or a framework that a state or other U.S. jurisdiction can consult as it drafts new legislation, amends an existing statute or seeks to bring itself into uniform practice with other jurisdictions or into conformity with federal law. NASBLA's model acts deal with various aspects of boating safety, from safety equipment on vessels to safe operation of vessels to mandating boating safety education for operators, providing a significant component in injury prevention.

Another group with a significant role in influencing policy and legislation concerning boating safety is the National Transportation Safety Board. Established in 1967, the NTSB is charged by the federal government to investigate every civil aviation accident in the United States and major accidents in the other modes of transportation. Its major product is its safety recommendations, each of which represents a potential safety improvement in transportation. (*Editor's note: For more information about the National Transportation Safety Board, see page 7.*)

## **Keep Up the Good Work**

While injury prevention at the basic level is anything that helps prevent injuries, it works best with a comprehensive approach. Effective injury prevention entails a variety of specific, interrelated components – each of which serves a vital function to the overall process. The Spectrum of Prevention, as outlined by Larry Cohen and Susan Swift, illustrates one comprehensive approach to injury prevention that can easily be adapted for recreational boating safety purposes.

For their injury prevention efforts to succeed, boating professionals should strive to include each level of the Spectrum in their agencies' boating safety programs. Examples abound showing that injury prevention tactics from all six levels are being implemented, so keep up the good work. It's satisfying to be able to report that a boater survived a boating accident with only minor injuries. But it'll be even more gratifying to report that boaters are avoiding injuries while on the water. ■

## Fit to Float Life Jacket Campaign Launched

To raise awareness about the importance of wearing life jackets to prevent boating fatalities, the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, personal flotation device (PFD) manufacturer Stearns Inc., and outdoor supplies retailer Bass Pro Shops have teamed up on the nationwide Fit to Float campaign.

The goal of the Fit to Float campaign is to prevent drownings across the United States by educating the public on the importance of wearing a proper fitting life jacket.

“It’s about more than just wearing a life jacket,” said Peter Urgola, chief of the Vessel Examinations Department of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. “It’s also about wearing the right life jacket. Many people think they can use their life jackets for years and years, or hand them down from one generation to the next. Truth is, life jackets get worn out and lose their effectiveness.”

Urgola said an old, faded, waterlogged, leaky or ill-fitted PFD can be dangerous in that it provides a false sense of security. Such life jackets should be discarded.

“A poor fitting PFD can sometimes do more harm than good,” Urgola said. “Life jackets that are too big will push up around your face and prevent you from breathing. Life jackets that are too small won’t keep you afloat. Also, life jackets meant for adults do not work for children.”

The Fit to Float campaign features a life jacket exchange in which the public can trade in old or ill-fitting life jackets and receive a discount off the purchase of a new PFD. The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and the Stearns Inc. Safety Team will be at Bass Pro Shops on select dates to demonstrate the proper fit of a life jacket and answer questions. The trade-

in program will be held during Bass Pro Shop’s Boating and Camping Classics, which runs through June 2007.

## Survey Highlights Need for More Public Boat Ramps

A recent study conducted by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission shows that demand clearly exceeds the supply of public boat ramps built and maintained by the state agency. Conducted from October through December of 2006, the wide-ranging “Boating Access Survey” received input from 3,783 North Carolina residents, with particular attention paid to 20 coastal counties.

The report showed that roughly 7 out of 10 respondents use Commission boat ramps. Of that group, ease of use, convenient location and fishing opportunities near access points were cited as primary determining factors. A significant portion of those respondents cited crowding, limited parking and lack of public restrooms as major factors that should be addressed in an effort to improve Commission-run boat ramps.

These issues were more prevalent in coastal counties, where rapid shoreline development is making water access tougher to find. One out of three respondents in coastal counties said they’d lost access to a boat ramp in the last five years. Overall, roughly 7 out of 10 respondents said they’d like to see more public boat ramps.

It’s clear that boating is a popular pastime in North Carolina. On average, survey participants said they use their boats 58 days per year. The most common reasons for hitting the water were recreation, saltwater fishing, inland fishing and hunting.

The watercraft used by survey participants was quite varied. Among motorboat owners, 78 percent had a vessel that measured between 14 and 23 feet long. Roughly 22 percent of those surveyed used canoes or kayaks, while 8 percent owned personal watercraft and 6 percent hit the water in sailboats.

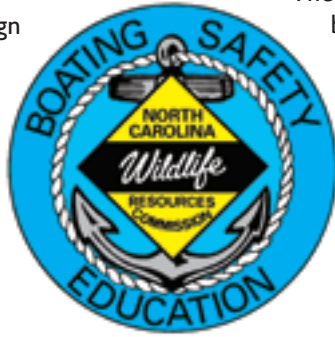
Data was gathered via an Internet survey, telephone survey, paper questionnaires and in-person interviews at boat ramps.

For more information on the study, or to see the survey results, visit the Commission’s website at [www.ncwildlife.org](http://www.ncwildlife.org).

## PWIA Produces DVD to Help First-time PWC Users

The Personal Watercraft Industry Association has developed a training video geared toward new operators of personal watercraft (PWCs). The 2007 PWC Renter Orientation video is now available as part of a free rental education package that PWIA provides to PWC rental businesses.

“Personal watercraft are great vessels for enjoying the water because they are easy to control, operate and maneuver,” PWIA Executive Director Maureen Healey said. “However, because the first experience many people have with a PWC is usually from a rental operation, PWIA is committed to making sure rental businesses have the training materials they need in order to provide sufficient instruction before riders go out on the water for the first time.”



In addition to the new video, the education kit includes a PWC safety checklist approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators.

There are more than 1.5 million registered PWCs in the United States. U.S. Coast Guard statistics show that 99 percent of PWCs are enjoyed accident-free each year.

Of the accidents that do occur, many — such as collisions with other boats or fixed objects — are preventable with proper education. For these reasons, the PWIA produced the PWC Renter Orientation DVD, specifically designed for renters and first-time users.

For more information or to request a PWC rental education kit, visit [www.pwia.org](http://www.pwia.org) or e-mail [info@pwia.org](mailto:info@pwia.org).

## Industry Groups Promise to Promote Boating Safety

The Marine Retailers Association of America (MRAA) and the United States Power Squadrons (USPS) have pledged to work together to encourage and promote recreational boating safety and the enjoyment of boating throughout the country.

The Memorandum of Understanding was signed Feb. 24 at the Power Squadrons' annual meeting in Jacksonville, Fla.

As part of the agreement, MRAA will provide contacts of marine retailers who are willing to promote USPS boating safety classes and civic service projects. The association also will post key boating information on [www.mraasafeboating.com](http://www.mraasafeboating.com) and provide appropriate MRAA-produced safety materials to the Power Squadrons.

The USPS will continue to conduct boating safety courses and civic service programs through participating marine retailers and will provide MRAA members in advance with dates, times and locations of safety courses.

## States Receive BIG Money

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More than \$9.5 million has been awarded to nine states through the federal Boating Infrastructure Grants (BIG) program. The grants are made available to state agencies and partners to build and maintain sites for recreational boaters.

The BIG program “strengthens community ties to the water’s edge by enhancing access to recreational, historic, cultural, natural and scenic resources for millions of boat owners,” said Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne.

Money for the program comes from the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund, formerly known as the Aquatic Resources Trust Fund, which is supported by excise taxes on certain fishing and boating equipment and on boat fuels.

Listed below are the states receiving the Tier II grants and the projects for which the money (along with matching funds) will be used:

### Alaska

\$1.5 million – develop overnight moorage sites for boaters in Prince William Sound.

### California

\$1.2 million – develop visiting boating sites in San Diego.

### Florida

\$1.2 million – construct visiting boating sites in downtown Clearwater.

### Iowa

\$3 million – develop visiting boating sites in downtown Dubuque on the Mississippi River.

### Michigan

\$582,315 – develop floating docks for visiting boaters at Black Lagoon.

### New Jersey

\$295,815 – develop restroom sites for visiting boaters in Belmar.

### North Carolina

\$310,268 – develop new slips for visiting boaters in Morehead City.

\$200,000 – develop docks for visiting boaters in Washington.

### Oregon

\$380,000 – develop new visiting boat tie-up sites on the historic waterfront of Toledo.

### Virginia

\$246,000 – construct additional visiting boating sites in downtown Hampton.

## Wireless Technology for Safety Afloat Takes CASBC Award

MariTech Industries received the 2006 Canadian Safe Boating Council (CASBC) Award for the Marine Industry, presented January 14, 2007 in Toronto, Canada. Each year the CASBC recognizes a company (or individual) that has introduced to Canada a boating product or technology that significantly improves boating safety. For 2006, that product was MariTech's wireless lanyard engine shutoff systems—Virtual Lifeline/CAST.

Since its introduction, this technology has received accolades from government entities, industry leaders, manufacturers and enthusiasts alike. CASBC's recognition is the second major award presented to MariTech for this exciting new technology. VL/CAST received the National Marine Manufacturers Association's award for safety in 2005.

