

Overview of the 2026 National Recreational Boating Safety Survey (NRBSS)

The NRBSS is the Coast Guard's method for estimating the totality of recreational boating in the U.S. and generating associated risk measures in accordance with the goals of the [National RBS Strategic Plan](#). The results are intended for use not only by the Coast Guard but also to support state and local agencies in efforts to improve boating safety and security, inform decisions about resource use, and ultimately make boating and water recreation safer and more enjoyable.

These surveys have been conducted periodically since 1973 to better understand how many people go boating, what types of boats they use, how often and how long they are on the water, and their use of safety equipment. The most recent survey was completed in 2018. In late February 2026, the U.S. Office of Management & Budget (OMB) approved the Coast Guard's request to conduct the collection again, thus kicking off this latest iteration of the NRBSS. Surveying will continue throughout CY 2026.

The survey is being conducted by a nonpartisan research organization, the National Opinion Research Center – NORC – at the University of Chicago, in partnership with the Coast Guard.

The NRBSS consists of two components:

- **The participation survey**, which will measure the number and demographics of people in the United States who went recreational boating in 2026. NORC is using its [AmeriSpeak® panel](#) to conduct household interviews multiple times during the year. The survey will provide national estimates as well as findings from demographic subgroups and segments of the recreational boating community that otherwise might not be captured.
- **The exposure survey** will generate estimates of usage patterns across different boat types, quantify the number of paddlecraft, and generate state-specific exposure estimates. NORC is conducting interviews with 50,000 households – across all 50 states and DC – that own or rent boats using an addressed-based probability sample, data of registered boat owners, and nonprobability samples. The survey design and large sample size is expected to provide reliable state-level estimates for both registered and unregistered boats, including total exposure hours and details on the types of safety equipment on board.

Among the features in the design and data collection for this year's survey is one adjustment – an expanded sample to improve the quality and detail of the boating activity data. To capture boaters that might not otherwise be identified – such as paddlers – the Coast Guard and NORC are seeking volunteers to complete a brief sign-up page at https://norcfed.gov1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0ezfBlrTYxLdG4e asking about their boating habits and to share contact information for a *possible* invitation to participate in the larger survey.



Please share your contact information at <http://bit.ly/3Lpfyhg> to take part in the U.S. Coast Guard survey, which helps strengthen national safety initiatives and support local law enforcement programs.



See the next page for NRBSS Resources

Resources

- National Recreational Boating Safety Survey (USCG Boating Safety Division webpage): <https://uscgboating.org/statistics/national-recreational-boating-safety-survey.php>
- USCG StoryMap Overview: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/88843802027049299d25ae755b724ccd>
- National Recreational Boating Safety Survey (NASBLA Lighthouse NRBSS resource webpage): <https://www.nasbla.org/nasblamain/lighthouse/get-equipped/boating-survey>
- NORC Project Page: <https://www.norc.org/research/projects/the-national-recreational-boating-safety-survey.html>
- Copies of 2018 survey reports
 - <https://uscgboating.org/library/recreational-boating-survey/NRBSS-Exposure-Survey-Final-Report-20201130-v3.0.pdf>
 - <https://uscgboating.org/library/recreational-boating-survey/NRBSS-Participation-Survey-Final-Report-20201130-v4.0.pdf>