



Photo Credit: United States Coast Guard

Making Boating Better Through Springtime Education Courses

Written by Edwin Lyngar

Even the most casual boater often believes that he or she knows everything necessary to have a great day out boating. However, if you've spent any significant amount of time on the water, it's obvious that too many boaters are confused or unaware of some basic rules about navigation, alcohol use and safety equipment. To help improve boating knowledge, and thereby boater safety, the [National Association of State Boating Law Administrators](#), the [U.S. Coast Guard](#), and a group of public and private boating safety entities are promoting the [Spring Aboard – Take a Boating Education Course](#) campaign.

The *Spring Aboard* campaign is a nationally coordinated effort that aims to get boaters educated in boating safety *before* the boating season begins. The campaign facilitates a weeklong heightened awareness component of the year-round campaign, and takes place March 18-24 when many course providers are offering discounts or other incentives for students who enroll or complete a boating safety education course.

“If we can increase the knowledge of the average boater, we can make our waterways significantly safer for recreational boaters,” said Tom Guess, President of the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA). “The majority of recreational boaters are not on the water frequently enough, or for the length of time needed, to become an expert at operating a vessel. They are out with friends and family for the weekend or for a holiday, but they still need to know the important basics of boating safety to have a safe and enjoyable experience. This is where boating education plays an important role.”

The Spring Aboard – Take a Boating Education Course campaign is produced under a grant awarded to the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators from the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund administered by the U.S. Coast Guard.





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Most states have some form of mandatory education program that encourages or requires boaters to take a boating education course in person or online. Even when courses are mandatory, many boaters overlook boating education requirements as the excitement and heat of summer grips them and they head to the water. The goal of the *Spring Aboard* campaign is to get boaters thinking about education before the spring and summer weather starts pulling people outside.

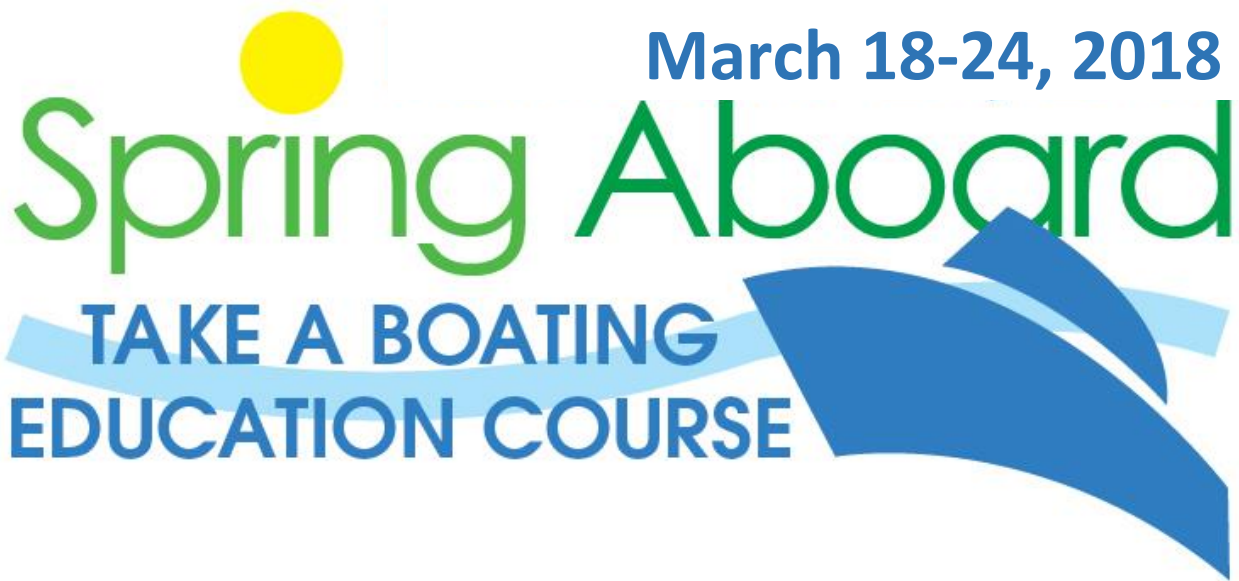
Boating trends and statistics tell us that educated boaters have fewer accidents, but convincing boaters to take a course on safe boating habits cannot just be about fear of a catastrophic incident. Boating education is about more than avoiding accidents. Educated boaters are more confident boaters and they are able to enjoy the boating experience much more.

Another challenge that has always hindered boating education is that activities like boating, fishing and waterskiing are supposed to be fun and relaxing. Nobody wants to think about accident statistics or drunken boating arrests when they think about getting out on the water. “People boat for an escape, so when we talk about the dangers of boating like accidents and fatalities, some people don’t want to listen,” said Guess.

One of the ways the *Spring Aboard* campaign is encouraging boaters to take a boating safety course is to help make courses affordable for everyone. During the heightened awareness week of the *Spring Aboard* campaign, March 18-24, many private course providers are offering discounts. [BOATsmart!](#) is offering steep discounts on their boating safety courses and [BOATERexam.com](#) is offering 50% off the price of their courses for the entire week.

“Taking an online course is an easy way to quickly get up to speed on the most important boating knowledge,” said Kerry Moher, Co-founder of BOATERexam.com. “But our course isn’t just convenient, it’s also a lot of fun. We have literally thousands of reviews from boaters telling us how much they enjoyed taking our course.”

Boat-Ed.com is also offering a 50% discount on boating safety courses. “Our online courses are better than ever with interactive videos and a true student-centered approach,” said Mitch Strobl of Boat-Ed.com. “Boating education isn’t boring; it’s easy to access and fun.”



For those who want to take a traditional classroom course, you can find classes just about anywhere in America during *Spring Aboard* week. The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary is a nationwide organization that offers boating courses in virtually every state in America. The courses are very inexpensive, and are often held on the weekends.

“I think we can provide a great service by having experienced boaters answer questions and engage with boaters on a personal level,” said Bill Stolz, Coast Guard Auxiliary member and boating instructor.

Even in states without mandatory education, boaters still have the opportunity to improve upon their knowledge of boating safety. “We offer free classroom courses every month, materials for home study, and four different online courses,” says Josh Hoffman, Boating Safety Education Coordinator for the Arizona Game and Fish Department. Most states offer similar opportunities through their boating agencies.

This year is the third anniversary of the *Spring Aboard* campaign. For the last few years, course providers, states and organizations have rolled out the program slowly. This year, the boating community is very excited about getting more people engaged.

“We are seeing a growing audience as the technology improves for course delivery and we get more course providers offering serious discounts for their courses,” said Guess. “Nobody goes boating to get into an accident, fall overboard or hurt themselves. As a boating safety community, we can make a real difference in the everyday experience of boaters on the water, and frankly I’m excited by that.”

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With the wide variety of organizations and businesses offering courses, such as the [U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary](#), [U.S. Sailing](#), [U.S. Power Squadrons](#), [BoatUS Foundation](#), and numerous private and online course providers, boaters have a wide variety of options when looking to get educated in boating safety. Boaters looking for more information on boating safety courses can contact their state boating agency or find additional information at <https://www.nasbla.org/education/taking-a-boat-course>.

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