

Summer Sense Campaign: Drinking, Boating & the Law

Summer Sense Campaign: Drinking, Boating & the Law – information provided by the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board.

Ann Marie Wolf, Army Substance Abuse Program

It's a bright sunny day on the water. It might seem like an ice-cold beer or a mixed drink would make your day of boating just about perfect, but think again. Alcohol and boating are a dangerous combination. Each year, about 700 people die in boating accidents. Alcohol is involved in close to 40% of these fatalities.

Long before a person becomes legally intoxicated, alcohol impairs his or her balance, reaction time, vision, and judgment. On the water, elements like motion, vibration, sun, wind, and spray can intensify alcohol's effects. Alcohol affects a boater very quickly. The results of boating under the influence can be just as tragic as drinking and driving.

Know the Basics.

Balance: A 1.5 ounce shot of 80 proof liquor, 5 ounce glass of wine, or a 12 ounce can of beer, can impair a person's sense of balance. When combined with the motion of the boat, this may be enough to cause a boater who has been drinking to fall overboard. Alcohol can also confuse a person to the point where he or she is unable to swim to the surface.

Reaction time: Alcohol slows the reaction time. It is difficult to process the sights and sounds around you in time to react after you've been drinking.

Judgment: Alcohol can keep a person from making sound decisions. A boater who has been drinking may take risks he or she normally would not.

Vision: Alcohol causes tunnel vision and makes it harder to focus. It can also impair depth perception, night vision, and peripheral vision, making it harder to judge speed, distance, and follow moving objects.

Illegal: It is illegal to operate a watercraft (including personal watercraft and jet-skis) on all waters of the Commonwealth while under the influence of alcohol or a controlled substance.

What Happens if I Get Caught?

If you are arrested for operating a watercraft while under the influence of alcohol or a controlled substance, you could face:

- fines between \$500 and \$7,500
- up to 2 years in jail
- suspension of your boating privileges for up to one year

If you refuse to take a breath, blood, or urine test, the Boating Commission will suspend your boating privileges for one year.

Homicide by watercraft while under the influence carries fines up to \$15,000, and three to seven years in prison.

Boaters who drink can often face other charges, such as:

- reckless or negligent operation of boats
- public drunkenness
- disorderly conduct
- open containers
- underage drinking

Boat Safely.

Whether you're operating a sail boat, a motorboat, or a jet ski, safe boating requires a clear head, steady hand, and observant eye. A boater who has been drinking cannot function as sharply as one who has not. If you drink before or while operating a boat, you risk your own life, as well as the lives of your passengers, crew, and others on the water.

Stay safe. Don't operate a boat under the influence of alcohol.

For additional information contact the Substance Abuse Office at 245 – 4576 or visit the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board web site at www.lcb.state.pa.us/edu/ or the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission at www.fish.state.pa.us