



A Century of Recreational Boating Safety

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Recreational boating in America has a fascinating history, which began even before our nation became a country. While boats were used as a means of transportation for migration, survival, and commercial purposes in those earliest of times, use of boats for pleasure was not uncommon.

Vessels played a major role in our nation's evolution, and they abounded in use. Harbors became crowded and accidents occurred, which led to laws, policies, and aids to navigation that helped to guide the masters of the vessels. In fact, such laws were enacted by our first Congress in 1789, the same year the U.S. Lighthouse Establishment (later known as the U.S. Lighthouse Service) was created.

More Vessels = More Safety Issues

In the 1800s, as technology evolved and motors were developed to propel vessels, there was a significant growth in commercial and recreational vessels. This led to another rise in accidents and a heightened concern for safety. Life-saving stations were established in 1848 and the U.S. Life Saving Service was organized in 1878.

In the later 1800s and early 1900s, which had a healthy economy, a growing amount of leisure time for many citizens, and the production of smaller motorboats, there was a huge step in the evolution of recreational boating. The unfortunate number of deaths and injuries

involved with recreational boating at this time drew the attention of our nation's lawmakers again.

A Century of Safety Begins

One hundred years ago, Congress enacted the Motorboat Act of 1910, establishing the first federal laws requiring lights, whistles, life preservers, and a way to extinguish fires aboard motorboats up to 65 feet in length.

While these early regulations were helpful, they couldn't keep up with the growth in recreational boating. The sale of motorboats soared with the development of the outboard motor. Other participants favored smaller sailboats, and those who couldn't afford either took to the water in canoes. Smaller boats at a lower cost and increasing leisure time for larger segments of the population also spurred the continuing growth in recreational boating.

By 1940, lawmakers again saw a need to address the growing number of accidents occurring with this increase in recreational boating, and enacted several amendments to the Motorboat Act of 1910. For the first time, Congress initiated federal requirements for motorboat construction, including requiring backfire flame arrestors and engine compartment and bilge ventilation. Reckless or negligent vessel operation was also outlawed.

State Participation

As the 1900s progressed, the number of recreational boats appeared to be growing even faster, as did the perception that too many boaters were being injured or killed. Unfortunately there was no system to accurately capture incident data for analysis.

To further enhance safety and to address the lack of incident data, Congress enacted the Federal Boating Act of 1958, which enhanced federal and state boating law uniformity. In a 1958 letter from the Secretary of the Treasury to Congress, the secretary stated the "primary purpose of this bill is:

- to require that all undocumented vessels propelled by machinery be systematically numbered for identification purposes,
- to authorize states to number boats within their jurisdiction in lieu of federal numbering provided standards prescribed by this legislation,
- to provide for some uniformity in numbering between participating states and the federal government,
- to establish reciprocity between participating states,
- to amend the Motorboat Act of 1940 to ... impose a duty on operators involved in accidents to render assistance on the scene and to report the accidents to designated officials."

Among other benefits, this act made states essential partners in this cooperative effort. Most of the states quickly enacted boating safety laws involving boat numbering, equipment, and operation. These laws were typically uniform, making it easier for boaters to be in compliance when traveling from one state to the next. Further, many states initiated boating safety programs to implement their new laws, increasing the number of officers on the water for enforcement and rescue. Several boating safety organizations were also formed during this time period and have become an indispensable part of the boating safety team.

Mixed Statistics

Also as a result of this 1958 act, the Coast Guard was tasked with collecting information on numbered boats and analyzing boating accident reports. In 1961 the Coast Guard published the first annual statistical report, which showed that there were 2.4 million "numbered" boats and that 819 people lost their lives in recreational boating accidents in 1960.

Invaluable Partners

Over the years many boating safety organizations have worked with the Coast Guard to collectively make boating safer and more enjoyable. These invaluable partners include:

The National Water Safety Congress

The American Boat and Yacht Council

The National Safe Boating Council

The National Association of State Boating Law Administrators

The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary

The U.S. Power Squadrons

BoatU.S.

U.S. Sailing

The National Boating Federation

The American Canoe Association

The Boy Scouts of America

The American Red Cross

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The National Marine Manufacturers Association

The National Boating Safety Advisory Council

The Water Sports Industry Association

The Personal Watercraft Industry Association

The Personal Flotation Device Manufacturers Association

United Safe Boating Institute

By 1968, there were 4.7 million numbered boats and, unfortunately, the number of deaths for that year had grown to 1,342. While, lamentably, the number of deaths had grown substantially, this represented a slower rate of growth than the number of boats used. In other words, the ratio of deaths to numbered boats was actually lower in 1968 than it was in 1960.

Despite the decreasing ratio, Congress was still concerned with the growing number of boating deaths, and studied the statistics to discover the way ahead. This review went on for a few years. In 1971, when the number of registered boats reached 5.5 million and the number of recreational boating deaths reached 1,582 in a single year, Congress enacted the Federal Boat Safety Act. This was by far the most comprehensive legisla-



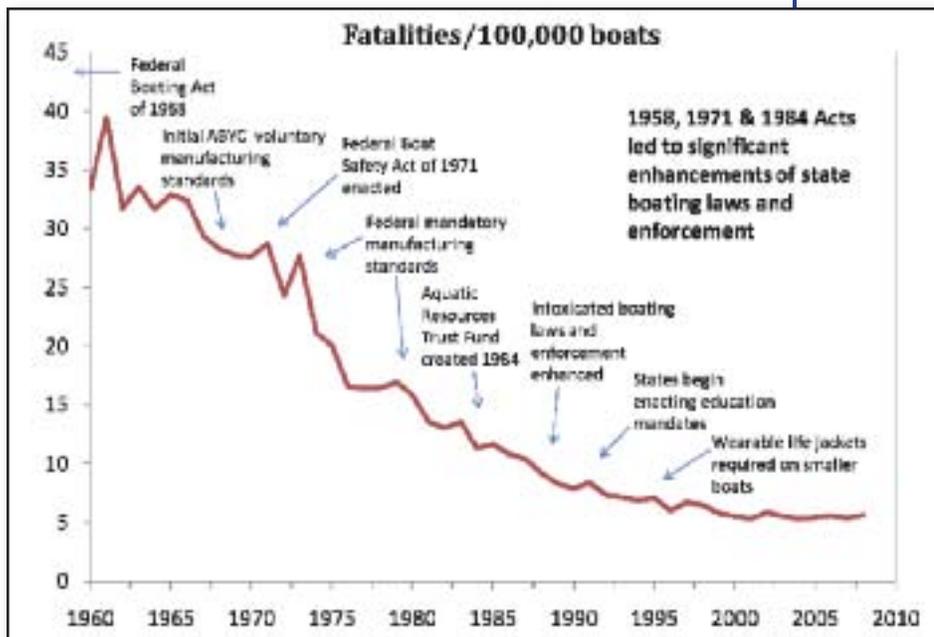
tion ever enacted to enhance boating safety. The American Boat and Yacht Council developed its first voluntary standards for the manufacturing of recreational boats during this time frame.

The Federal Boat Safety Act of 1971

In addition to formally establishing the National Recreational Boating Safety Program, a key component of

ically less than \$30 million a year. In fact, no funding was made available to the partners in the early 1980s even though the success of the program was obvious: The number of “numbered” boats increased to 9.1 million in 1982, while the number of boating deaths had dropped to 1,178—a small fraction of the 1971 ratio.

In the early 1980s the recreational boating community, recreational fishing community, federal agencies, and Congress took a hard look at the funding situation. Two members of Congress, Sen. Malcolm Wallop from Wyoming and Rep. John Breaux from Louisiana, led the way to formulate a plan to provide user-based funding to support boating and fishing programs on a more consistent and ongoing basis, and at much more appropriate funding levels. These collective efforts led to the Aquatic Resources Trust Fund in 1984, a dedicated revenue source funded by user taxes. The fund provides grants to states and vital non-profit safety organization partners.



this act gave the Coast Guard the authority to establish mandatory boat manufacturing and other standards, which have reduced boating accidents, property damage, injuries, and deaths.

The act also provided for grants that states could use to fund their boating safety law enforcement, public education, vessel numbering, and other related safety efforts. Over the first 13 years of this grant program, the funding level remained unstable and relatively low, typ-

implemented new enforcement techniques and programs to reduce impaired boating. At the same time, the states enacted mandatory education requirements for motorboat operators, and today the vast majority of U.S. states and territories require at least some motorboat operators to pass a course or exam. In the mid-1990s, the Coast Guard required that smaller boats carry wearable life jackets on board for each person, as opposed to the prior requirement that accepted a cushion or ring buoy in lieu of a wearable life jacket.

By the year 2000, the number of registered boats climbed to nearly 12.8 million, while the number of deaths dropped to approximately 700, bringing the ratio of deaths compared to the number of registered boats to a record low.

Are We There Yet?

Is the number of deaths down to an acceptable level, whereby no further actions beyond maintaining the current programs are needed? That’s the question the Coast Guard has asked its partners as well as its federal advisory committee, the National Boating Safety Advisory Council. It’s a difficult one.

Recreational Boating Statistics

Recent reports from the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment indicate that more than 82 million American adults participate in recreational boating each year, along with millions more youth.

Further, information from the Recreational Marine Research Center at Michigan State University indicates that in 2008 nearly 700,000 jobs in America were directly and indirectly related to recreational boating. Sales related to boating exceeded \$81 billion and the total impact on labor income exceeded \$26 billion.

Some people perceive that current laws and programs have brought down the number of deaths to a level where they cannot be further reduced without enacting new laws and implementing additional programs that could be costly, controversial, or difficult to implement. The reason for this perception: The number of deaths has remained at approximately 700 per year for the past 10 years. The ratio of deaths to the number of registered boats has also not decreased, since the number of registered boats has remained relatively constant.

For the Coast Guard and its many partners, though, even one death is unacceptable. In 2004 the National Boating Safety Advisory Council and representatives of various components of the recreational boating community (including users, manufacturers, retailers, safety organizations, and state and federal government officials) worked tirelessly to identify strategies that would reduce boating accidents.

The Strategic Plan of the National Recreational Boating Safety Program

In the spring of 2007 at the annual International Boating and Water Safety Summit, 20 organizations signed this plan. These partners helped identify a plethora of strategies to achieve the goal of reducing deaths and injuries related to recreational boating accidents. These strategies include:

- improving accident reporting through regulatory and policy amendments,
- enhancing training for investigators,
- creating better measures to determine the effectiveness of the strategies,
- focusing on measures that will increase life jacket wear (given that most boating deaths are drownings),
- enhancing the education and skill levels of boat operators.

Looking Ahead

The National Recreational Boating Safety Program has been tremendously successful to date, greatly reducing the number of injuries and deaths associated with recreational boating. However, the story does not end here.

With projections showing that recreational boating can anticipate a long future, and with ingenious American inventors who continue to develop new boat designs, we will continue our efforts to improve safety for all recreational boaters.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

For more information about the strategic plan, go to www.uscgboating.org and click on the link to the "Strategic Plan" of the National Recreational Boating Safety Program.

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The National Recreational Boating Survey

While the National Recreational Boating Safety Program is responsible for all forms of recreational boats and their safety, the current data is limited. For example, we know how many motorboats are in the U.S. because they have to be registered, but we don't really know how many canoes and kayaks there are. Federal law does not require them to be numbered, and only a handful of states require registration.

This skews the ratio that compares the number of recreational boating deaths to the number of registered boats because deaths associated with canoes and kayaks are counted in the total number of deaths, but the number of canoes and kayaks are not known and are not counted in the number of registered boats. Additionally, while most boat sales have slowed over the past decade, the number of kayaks sold has grown and remains high.

To resolve this situation, the Coast Guard has developed a new National Recreational Boating Survey that will be implemented in 2011. It has been designed to provide a wealth of vital data about the boats and boaters of our nation, including the number of canoes and kayaks as well as information about their users.

With this data, we will be able to develop more targeted and effective programs.

