

BUI INITIATIVES

BUI is just as deadly as drinking and driving!

Did you know:

- A boat operator is likely to become impaired more quickly than a driver, drink for drink.
- The penalties for BUI can include large fines, revocation of operator privileges and serious jail terms.
- The use of alcohol is involved in about a third of all recreational boating fatalities.

Every boater needs to understand the risks of boating under the influence of alcohol or drugs (BUI). It is illegal to operate a boat while under the influence of alcohol or drugs in every state. The Coast Guard also enforces a federal law that prohibits BUI. This law pertains to ALL boats (from canoes and rowboats to the largest ships) -- and includes foreign vessels that operate in U.S. waters, as well as U.S. vessels on the high seas.

Dangers of BUI

Alcohol affects judgment, vision, balance and coordination. These impairments increase the likelihood of accidents afloat - for both passengers and boat operators. U.S. Coast Guard data shows that in boating deaths involving alcohol use, over half the victims capsized their boats and/or fell overboard.

Alcohol is even more hazardous on the water than on land. The marine environment - motion, vibration, engine noise, sun, wind and spray - accelerates a drinker's impairment. These stressors cause fatigue that makes a boat operator's coordination, judgment and reaction time decline even faster when using alcohol.

Alcohol can also be more dangerous to boaters because boat operators are often less experienced and less confident on the water than on the highway. Recreational boaters don't have the benefit of experiencing daily boat operation. In fact, boaters average only 110 hours on the water per year.

Alcohol Effects

Alcohol has many physical effects that directly threaten safety and well-being on the water.

When a boater or passenger drinks, the following occur:

Cognitive abilities and judgment deteriorate, making it harder to process information, assess situations, and make good choices.

Physical performance is impaired - evidenced by balance problems, lack of coordination, and increased reaction time.

Vision is affected, including decreased peripheral vision, reduced depth perception, decreased night vision, poor focus, and difficulty in distinguishing colors (particularly red and green).

Inner ear disturbances can make it impossible for a person who falls into the water to distinguish up from down.

Alcohol creates a physical sensation of warmth - which may prevent a person in cold water from getting out before hypothermia sets in.

As a result of these factors, a boat operator with a blood alcohol concentration above .10 percent is estimated to be more than 10 times as likely to die in a boating accident than an operator with zero blood alcohol concentration. Passengers are also at greatly increased risk for injury and death - especially if they are also using alcohol.

Estimating Impairment

This table gives a guide to average impacts of alcohol consumption. However, many factors, including prescription medications and fatigue, can affect an individual's response to alcohol, and impairment can occur much more quickly as a result. There is NO safe threshold for drinking and operating a boat, so do not assume you are safe just because you fall into the "rarely" or "possibly" influenced categories.

Enforcement and Penalties

The Coast Guard and every state have stringent penalties for violating BUI laws. Penalties can include large fines, suspension or revocation of boat operator privileges, and jail terms. The Coast Guard and the states cooperate fully in enforcement in order to remove impaired boat operators from the waters.

In waters that are overseen solely by the states, the states have the authority to enforce their own BUI statutes. In state waters that are also subject to U.S. jurisdiction, there is concurrent jurisdiction. That means if a boater is apprehended under Federal law in these waters, the Coast Guard will (unless precluded by state law) request that state law enforcement officers take the intoxicated boater into custody.

When the Coast Guard determines that an operator is impaired, the voyage may be terminated. The vessel will be brought to mooring by the Coast Guard or a competent and un-intoxicated person on board the recreational vessel. Depending on the circumstances, the Coast Guard may arrest the operator, detain the operator until sober, or turn the operator over to state or local authorities.

Tips for Avoiding BUI

Boating, fishing and other water sports are fun in their own right. Alcohol can turn a great day on the water into the tragedy of a lifetime.

Consider these alternatives to using alcohol while afloat:

Take along a variety of cool drinks, such as sodas, water, iced tea, lemonade or non-alcoholic beer.

Bring plenty of food and snacks.

Wear clothes that will help keep you and your passengers cool.

Plan to limit your trip to a reasonable time to avoid fatigue. Remember that it's common to become tired more quickly on the water.

If you want to make alcohol part of your day's entertainment, plan to have a party ashore at the dock, in a picnic area, at a boating club, or in your backyard.... Choose a location where you'll have time between the fun and getting back into your car or boat.

If you dock somewhere for lunch or dinner and drink alcohol with your meal, wait a reasonable time (estimated at a minimum of an hour per drink) before operating your boat.

Having no alcohol while aboard is the safest way to enjoy the water -- intoxicated passengers are also at risk of injury and falls overboard.

Spread the word on the dangers of BUI. Many recreational boaters forget that a boat is a vehicle - and that safe operation is a legal and personal responsibility.