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**Boating Safety – It's For Everyone**

**By James "Doc" Lewis**

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Boating, when a few simple rules are followed, is one of the safest family activities there is. U.S. statistics show boating is twice as safe as biking, five times as safe as driving a car, and 24 times as safe as scuba diving. By practicing safe boating, you will provide a wonderful pastime for yourselves and give your children a love of the water that will last them a lifetime.

**So What Goes Wrong?**

Having made such a sweeping endorsement of the relative safety of boating, how do we explain the glaring headlines which we find in the press on an all to regular basis?

Fortunately, for you and me, there are numerous public agencies which spend a lot of time and money doing the research and compiling data. After researching their findings it becomes obvious that a little preparation and planning can all but eliminate therisks.

**Some Pertinent Facts:**

The most common accident to passengers and crew is falling overboard. According to the statistics over 40% of all fatal boating accidents start this way. It can be avoided if boaters make sure they have good footing and a good hand–hold at all times. An, age–old, seafaring reminder, which I first heard in the Coast Guard, goes like this. "One hand for the ship, one hand for the sailor."

Children should never be allowed to move about on an underway boat. If you need to move around on the boat, for any reason, reduce speed and make sure to get and keep a grip with at least one hand.

Alcohol and water don't mix. In a Red Cross study, two–thirds of boating injury victims had consumed alcohol. Almost 40% had an alcohol level above the legal limit. Besides being illegal, it's dangerous to operate any kind of machinery while drinking. A boat is no exception.

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35% of boating accidents were directly attributable to alcohol use and the overwhelming primary cause of fatalities was alcohol-related. If you drink and boat, you are more likely to be involved in an accident, and once involved, more likely to die.

53% of fatal boating accident victims drowned, while 39% suffered trauma and 9% died of other causes.

### What About All Those Drownings?

A recent Red Cross study noted 92% of boating-related drowning victims were either not wearing a PFD or life jacket or were wearing one incorrectly.

The US Coast Guard is even more to the point, stating that of the 519 boaters who drowned in the year

2000, life jackets could have saved the lives of approximately 445 of those boaters who drowned. In 2000, approximately eight out of every ten victims in fatal boating accidents were not wearing life jackets.

Always carry enough Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) for each person on board, and make sure that each of them knows where they are and how to use them. It's your responsibility, Captain. No one, least of all yourself, wants to hear that you thought they knew how to put on a PFD. If anyone won't prove their knowledge of the device, or buddy up with someone to teach them, leave them ashore. You'll both be better off.

Children and non-swimmers should wear one at all times that the boat is underway. For water-skiing, fishing, or simply cruising, PFDs are absolutely essential. It's now even easier to find the ideal PFD because they're available in a wide array of sizes, colors and patterns. You can now choose one in your favorite color, or to match your swimsuit or boat. Just make sure it fits properly!

Does boating education help in preventing accidents?

I can't stress this point enough.

A recent Florida study brought out these interesting facts.

72% of operators involved in boating accidents had no formal instruction in the operation of a boat.

2.5 times as many accidents involve boaters who have had no boating safety instruction.

Boating is a wonderful pastime, and lots of fun but, there are a few things, that one needs to know, in order for it to be a safe pastime. And don't worry about looking silly, I've been around boats all my life, (53 years) and hardly a day goes by that I don't learn something new or discover a new and better way of doing something.

Two years ago I took a boating safety course with the idea that, with all my experience, I might be of

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help to some of the new people. Fact is, there were so many things I didn't know, or had forgotten, that I spent a good deal of time just asking questions. When the class was over, several of the students came up and thanked me for asking all the questions they weren't sure how to ask. Guess I was a help to the new people, after all, just not in the way I figured.

Whether you are an old "salt", with years of boating experience, or a "lubber", who gets lost in the bathtub, do yourself and your loved ones a favor and take an approved boating safety course. The time to think through, and plan for a journey in a strange environment, is before you make the trip.

### Safety Tips

To prevent ending up in the emergency department as a result of carelessness during your next boating trip, the American College of Emergency Physicians recommends the following safety tips: Tell someone when you're going, who is with you and how long you'll be away. Then check your boat, equipment, boat balance, engine and fuel supply before leaving. Before starting your engine, open hatches, run blower, and most importantly, carefully sniff for gasoline fumes in the fuel and engine areas. When changing seats, stay low and near center line of a small boat. Always carry life jackets and first aid equipment. Watch the weather. Sudden wind shifts, light flashes and choppy water can

mean a storm is brewing. If you will be fishing, keep fishing and hunting gear clean and well packed. A loose fish hook can cause a lot of pain and ruin a great outing. Bring an extra length of line to secure boat and equipment. Never drink alcoholic beverages on a boat. Being "tipsy" can result in falling overboard. Your ability to swim to safety or call for help is greatly reduced as alcohol slows reactions.

### So There You Have It

To learn more about safe boating, I'd like to suggest these Online sources of information. Coast Guard Auxiliary, or the U.S. Power Squadrons. Our sister-site,

offers more tips on boating

safety and a complete page of links to Boating Safety related websites on the Internet.

May all of your boating adventures be joyous and happy ones, unblemished by the blight of accident or injury.

James "Doc" Lewis has been "messin about in boats" for as long as he can remember. He is owner/operator of BoatDocs1, a full-service boat detailing-yacht maintenance business serving the Emerald Coast region of Florida. To learn more about boats and keeping them looking their best visit his web site at:

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## **Boating Holiday Together With Family**

**By Abby Johnson**

So long as the weather permits, you can go for a boat ride anytime. What better way than to spend a summer day than sailing on the waterway. Summer holidays get another meaning, when you add some boating activities to it. Getting the family together and planning for a boating holiday assure a memorable vacation.

The spring and summer holidays offer the best possible opportunities for taking your family out for a holiday in the waters, sailing all the way. The three important boating holiday dates are Memorial Day, Independence Day and Labor Day. These days are excellent for boating as the weather is warm and conducive with clear blue skies. Ideal to go out for boating. If you do not have a boat

So what do you do if you don't own a boat. If you so desire, you can always hire one. There are many places on the waterfront who allow you to rent a boat very conveniently. Get your family together, call some friends to join you and you could rent a couple of boats and set out to taste freedom in the waters. Some packed lunch adds to the fun. Practice boating holidays with safety

There are of course some rules that you have to follow, when it comes to boating, even if you are on a holiday. The fact is, you have to practice more caution during the holiday season. For one, there are more people boating during holidays. Which means you have to be cautious in the crowd. You have to be courteous to them. Never use alcohol or drugs if you are planning to sail. After all, safety comes first, for you and those with you. Explore and relax for the holidays

Come to think of it, boating is one of the most relaxing and pleasurable holiday activities. While enjoying the tranquil beauty of nature around you, you could try your hand in a little fishing also. Water is a treasure house of wonderful animal life and plants and what better way to spend time than to sit on the side of the boat and wait for some strange or familiar fish to come and bite your bait.

Make it a boating tradition

It makes sense to make boating a sort of a tradition in your family - a kind of must-have for the year. This leaves fond memories for everyone and gives everybody something to look forward to. So, make it a habit to pack some sumptuous lunch, apply the necessary sun blocks and take off on a relaxing holiday on the boat.

Abby Johnson is a staff writer at

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