

Log M-225

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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Forwarded to:

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SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

M-83-72 through -74

The National Transportation Safety Board has long been concerned about the role of alcohol in the many recreational boating accidents, fatalities, and injuries that occur annually. As early as 1969, the Safety Board recommended that the Coast Guard and States use the same boating accident report and that it should include, as one important item, whether intoxication or other physical impairment was involved. 1/ Recent recreational boating accidents have heightened the Board's concern. Moreover, there is increased public awareness of the hazards of alcohol use in all modes of transportation. We know that the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) shares the concern of the Safety Board for the protection of the recreational boating public and those involved in other water-related activities who are placed in life-threatening situations by those who dangerously operate boats while under the influence of alcohol. 2/

Two recent accidents have highlighted the problem. On July 27, 1983, two recreational boats, one 17 feet long and one 30 feet long, collided on the Severn River near Annapolis, Maryland, killing four persons. The 30-foot boat went through the hull and then over the small vessel. All four persons killed were on the small vessel. There was evidence that considerable amounts of alcohol had been consumed by the persons in the 17-foot boat; the operator of the boat had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.21 percent.

In a similar occurrence on August 31, 1983, a 26-foot recreational boat collided with the 95-foot dinner vessel DANDY on the Potomac River, Washington, D.C. The DANDY has a 200-passenger capacity. Fortunately, none of the dinner guests were injured when the recreational boat struck the bow of the DANDY. However, the operator of the small recreational boat was fatally injured. It was determined that the operator of the recreational boat had a BAC of 0.23 percent.

1/ Safety Recommendation M-69-47 was issued February 13, 1969, in the National Transportation Safety Board's "Study of Recreational Boat Accidents, Boating Safety Programs, and Preventive Recommendations."

2/ For more detailed information, read Safety Study—"Recreational Boating Safety and Alcohol" (NTSB/SS-83/02).

In both of these cases, the BAC was more than twice the generally accepted BAC of 0.10 percent established by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the Congress, and most States, including the District of Columbia, as the level at which highway drivers are considered to be driving while intoxicated.

During its study of the role of alcohol in recreational boating accidents, fatalities, and injuries, the Safety Board found that the Coast Guard and State boating law authorities suspect alcohol use to be a major factor in the high number of recreational boating fatalities. However, representative and credible national statistics are not available. Several factors affect the national statistics issued by the Coast Guard, including:

- o Not all accidents are reported to the States or to the Coast Guard.
- o Only in the approximately 25 percent of the fatal accidents investigated by the Coast Guard is there any assurance of verification of injuries, property damage, or definitive primary and secondary causes.
- o Compliance with reporting requirements varies from location to location and is influenced by Coast Guard and State enforcement practices and programs.
- o Boating accident reports are usually completed by the person involved in the accident or next of kin, who may not provide accurate and objective information about the accident.

Nationally, there are no uniform reporting requirements or guidelines for collecting information on the use of alcohol in recreational boating accidents, fatalities, and injuries. For example, in 1982, the Coast Guard received reports on 5,377 recreational boating accidents which resulted in 1,178 fatalities, 2,682 injuries, and \$15.3 million in property damage. Based on data available to the Coast Guard, only 95 of these recreational boating accidents involved alcohol as a primary or secondary cause, resulting in 70 fatalities, 22 injuries, and property damage of \$46,700. This amounts to 1.8 percent of the accidents and 6 percent of the fatalities. However, based on some State data that have recently become available, the use of alcohol and its effects in recreational boating accidents, fatalities, and injuries appear to be grossly underreported. In two States, information received indicates that 35 to 38 percent of the fatalities in recreational boating accidents were "legally drunk" at the generally accepted BAC of 0.10 percent. Additionally, one State indicates that as high as 80 percent of the fatalities in 1 year were alcohol related, and in one State 75 percent of the accidents over a 3-year period were alcohol related.

The Safety Board believes that the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) in coordination with the United States Coast Guard should develop uniform education and enforcement programs to address the hazards of alcohol use to reduce recreational boating accidents, fatalities, and injuries. In the model enforcement program, the NASBLA should provide guidance for a defined level of intoxication and toxicological and chemical testing requirements. Additionally, the NASBLA should play a lead role in ensuring that the boating accident report form is updated to include a specific accident causal entry for alcohol involvement in recreational boating accidents.

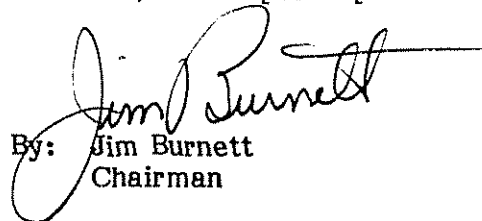
Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators:

In coordination with the United States Coast Guard, develop uniform guidelines for a model education program that can be implemented by the States to address the hazards of alcohol use and its effects on recreational boat operators. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-83-72)

In coordination with the United States Coast Guard, develop a model enforcement program that can be uniformly implemented by the States to reduce accidents, fatalities, and injuries related to alcohol use in recreational boating operations. At a minimum, include in the model enforcement program a defined level of intoxication and toxicological and chemical testing requirements. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-83-73)

In coordination with the United States Coast Guard, develop a model State boating accident report form to include a specific accident causal entry for alcohol involvement in recreational boating accidents. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-83-74)

BURNETT, Chairman, and McADAMS, BURSLEY, and ENGEN, Members, concurred in these recommendations. GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, did not participate.


By: Jim Burnett
Chairman