



WAVES

Watercraft and Vessel Safety

THE NEWSLETTER FROM THE U.S. COAST GUARD AUXILIARY DEPARTMENT OF BOATING

VOLUME 8, ISSUE 1

FEBRUARY, 2004

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RETHINKING MANDATORY PFD WEAR

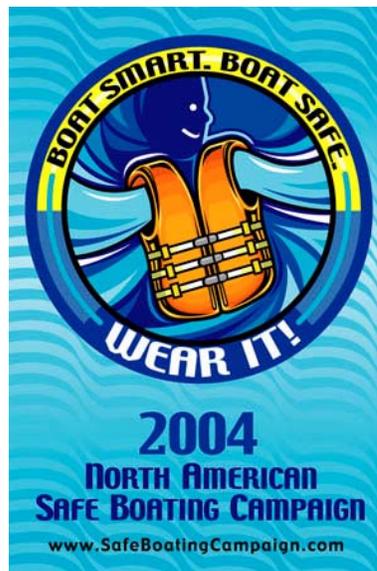
William S. Griswold, BC-BLN

For years, the National Safe Boating Campaign has exhorted the public to "Boat Smart, Boat Safe, Wear It" or older versions, "It Floats, You Don't", "Boat Smart from the Start, Wear your Life Jacket", direct references to wearing your lifejacket. Every organization associated with recreational boating safety pounds that message, in classrooms, in literature, during vessel checks, at boating booths, and in the media. This core message transcends alcohol abuse, hypothermia, and all the other hazards one might encounter on the water. Yet, the *JSI National PFD Wearage Observational Study 2002*, funded by a grant from the Wallop-Breaux Trust Fund states, that there has been no improvement in PFD wear rates over the five year period, 1998-2002. This study observed a total of 71,074 boats and 190,936 people during the 5-year period. And I believe that most would agree this is the case. Our present tactics are not improving the situation.

In 2003, the Canadian Safe Boating Council commissioned Smart Risk to investigate the advisability of advocating for legislation mandatory PFD wear for boaters in small craft. This comprehensive paper looked at four blocks of research:

- The magnitude of the issue
- The risk factors involved, with particular emphasis on the role of PFD wear
- The political and legal context
- The likely public response to the introduction of legislation

Concurrently, and possibly without a direct connection, the National Boating Safety Advisory Committee passed a resolution to study mandatory wear of life jackets on boats 21 feet and under. The Western States Boating Administrators at their annual 2003 meeting passed a resolution supporting the Advisory Committee's stance and brought a resolution to the 2003 National Association of State Boating Law Administrators conference asking that body to adopt a model act requiring PFD wear on small boats. That resolution was sent back to committee for further work. However, the resolution contained a statement that NASBLA adopted a resolution in 1973 requesting the Congress to impose mandatory PFD wear on boats less than 16 feet as a national requirement. This issue has been around for some time.



NASBW is May 22-28, 2004

In boating statistics in the U.S. and in Canada, the numbers show that roughly 80% of the recreational boating fatalities drown, and that wearing life jackets could have saved about 80% of those who did drown. This has held firm over the years, and has become a constant. Other studies show that the wear rate increases with rough weather,

but that most fatalities occur in fair weather and calm water. People end up in the water unexpectedly, and having a jacket immediately available is usually not an option. Even if the jacket ends up in the water next to the victim, putting it on while swimming is difficult at best. A comparison might be buckling up your seat belt just before the collision. It probably is reasonable that if 700 people die in boating accidents, about 560 will drown, and 448 could survive had they had their jackets on.

The boating community has used the same arguments to justify mandatory wearing of PFDs for children. Many states have passed laws requiring children of various ages to wear a proper fitting PFD. The Coast Guard passed a Federal Regulation covering those states without a PFD law, which will require children 12 and under to wear their PFD. The Canadian paper finds an unwillingness of government to institute an unpopular regulatory regime, and the perception that mandatory wear would be extremely unpopular. However, in public opinion polls a solid majority of boaters supported the idea of mandatory wear in Canada.

An associated issue could be the liability of boat owners or operators in accidents involving the non-use of PFDs, Canadian courts are not agreed on the factors determining liability or standards of reasonable care, thus the legal front is confused by the lack of a standard. Another issue is the economic impact of the needless loss of life, when taking lifetime earnings, medical costs

and other factors such as maintenance of search and rescue assets, the costs are very high.

Lack of training and inexperience, plus an overconfidence of swimming ability probably are the largest hurdles to wearing a PFD. In Canada, water temperature is a large factor in boating fatalities, but almost half of the canoe & kayak fatalities in the U. S. between 1996 and 2000 occurred in water over 65 degrees. Cold water is a threat even in Florida. The National Transportation Safety Board has reports reinforcing these claims, and says that the majority of people who perish while wearing their jacket died because of hypothermia.

Seat belt and bike helmet legislation could be good models to compare PFD wear to. Once seat belts began showing up in automobiles, persuasion campaigns failed to get them on 20% of the occupants of vehicles. However, over the years, mandatory wear laws were enacted and those percentages have climbed to over 80% wearing their belts. Even with a catchy "Buckle Up for Safety" slogan, it took legislation to persuade the public that everyone really needed to buckle up. Bike helmets are on the same track. And when one considers the effort and money spent on asking people to wear their PFD, the similarities are striking.

This whole issue is about saving lives. Those in the boating safety business advocate wearing a jacket. Law Enforcement agencies and true professionals put on a jacket in a small boat. However, we see over 50% of people in a canoe not wearing a jacket, yet require a person on a Personal Water Craft to wear one, something is off course. Statistics show that the vast majority of deaths in boating accidents happened on boats under 22 feet, and were completely unexpected. Putting a jacket on everyone in that category would be the single most effective way to reduce those deaths.

I know that this will be a long haul, that there are many players, and across this nation it will bump along, as has countless other legislative initiatives. I would recommend that every serious boater study this issue and consider the effects it could have on our sport. We wear the right gear to play all sorts of games, and lately we require our kids to wear their jackets on the water. Why not the same standard for us?

I invite you to read the Canadian Research Project, a compelling recommendation for mandatory wear. It can be found at www.csbc.ca. There are many other documents addressing this issue in various ways, "Critical Judgment" by the American Canoe Association, the JSI Study previously mentioned, Saving Lives and Preventing Boating-Related Accidents by NASBLA, and a host of presentations offered at the International Boating & Water Safety Summit, reported in their Proceedings. Approach this issue with an open mind; we need your counsel.

MEET OUR DEPARTMENT'S NEWEST MEMBER

Tony Lorenc, DVC-BS

The Boating Department takes great pleasure in introducing a new Branch Chief in the States Division.

Robert E. Sterzenbach, from the sleepy Southern California town of San Juan Capistrano in the 11th Southern District, will be coordinating the State Liaison Officers in the Pacific Region. Bob and his wife of 40 years, Ulah, have four adult children, one living in Australia, one in Kansas, and the others nearby. They also have five grandchildren. They have enjoyed the annual return of the fabled swallows to their hometown, although not in the numbers of the past since the birds now prefer to fly further inland to the Colorado River.

Bob joined the CG Auxiliary in 1975 and worked his way up the elected and appointed positions, and just finished two years as RCO, a position that he truly loved because it afforded him a great deal of interface with the membership. He is a certified TQM facilitator and has facilitated many key Quality Action Teams for his district. Being AUXOP, he loves operations and is a QE. He also patrols on his PWC facility at the nearby lakes and Dana Point Harbor, which is five miles from Capistrano.

As a new member of the States Division, Bob is looking forward to the interface with the state boating offices through the SLOs in the Pacific Area. His incredible experience, attitude and positive disposition sum his enthusiasm best when he stated, "I believe it is a valuable, proactive Auxiliary function, and will give it my full attention."

His hobbies are boating/sailing, fishing, traveling, digital photography, and helping (we hope) his wife collect antique Depression glass that she loves. He's a retired (2 years) electro-mechanical engineer, having worked 43 years for Endevco, a company that makes a variety of transducers. He still does some consulting work in the field of shock and vibration.

We look forward to Bob's contributions to the Boating Department, the SLO program and most especially, the enhancement of public boating safety.

GREAT NEWS FROM BOATU.S. FOUNDATION REGARDING BOTH RECREATIONAL BOATING SAFETY GRANTS AND THE CLEAN WATER GRANTS PROGRAM

Ed Sweeney, DVC-BR

First off, I hope that everyone had a festive holiday season and is ready to get back to doing Auxiliary work. Let's Do Even More in 2004!

I also come bearing very good news! The BoatU.S. Foundation recently announced that fifteen units will receive a total of \$24,000 in funding for local projects to promote recreational boating safety.

Listed below are the winning Auxiliary units, along with a brief description of their projects that will receive funding:

- **Flotilla 95, D7**, will receive \$1,000 to print and distribute 1500 Hurricane Preparedness Booklets.
- **Flotilla 16-6, D9CR**, will receive \$2,500 to purchase a display tent and equipment, a display board and case, a Fatal Vision Kit, and other display equipment.
- **Flotilla 53, D1SR**, will receive \$3,000 to produce 2500 **Spanish language Safe Boating in New York Harbor** brochures.
- **Flotilla 71, D5SR**, will receive \$500 to purchase educational supplies to help promote safe and fun boating for children in the Smith Island area.
- **Flotilla 22, D1SR**, will receive \$600 to distribute 300 temporary CO Detectors and educational informational letters provided by the BoatU.S. Foundation.
- **Flotilla 18, D5SR**, will receive \$1,200 to produce a CO hot topic program that could include: reprinting of materials, marketing signs, mailers, packets for trainees, and a presentation by a professional trainer.
- **Flotilla 39, D11NR**, will receive \$4,950 to install a VHF repeater system that will improve radio communications on Lake Shasta.
- **Division 10, D11SR**, will receive \$1,050 to produce 125 signs to be affixed to marina fuel pumps that describe proper fueling procedures and the harms of CO exposure.
- **Flotilla 44, D7**, will receive \$1,540 to produce 24 signs that will be placed at local boat ramps promoting vessel safety checks.
- **Flotilla 12-91, D11NR**, will receive \$2,100 to produce 10 CO displays and posters to be used at various local events.
- **Flotilla 13-6, D5NR**, will receive \$525 to distribute 250 temporary CO Detectors and educational informational letters provided by the BoatUS Foundation.
- **Flotilla 64, D5SR**, will receive \$155 to upgrade their visual display booth.
- **District 8WR** will receive \$780 to purchase 80 "Where Do We Stand" CO videos to be used for educational purposes.
- **Flotilla 10-13, D1SR**, will receive \$3,200 to produce 4000 charts of the New York/New Jersey Greenwood Lake.
- **Flotilla 76, D1NR** will receive \$1,000 to support their boating safety children's education program.

Congratulations to all the units and their leaders who received funding. BRAVO ZULU!

However, congratulations also go out to those units who took the time to apply for the BoatU.S. RBS Grants. A total of 51 Auxiliary units submitted applications, requesting a total of \$149,000 for projects dealing with

recreational boating safety. "The Auxiliary accounted for a whopping 63 percent of the total applications," according to David Carter from the BoatU.S. Foundation.

To those who were not selected this year, I offer you a bit of sage advice: **If at first you do not succeed, try, try again!** Look for CY 05 RBS applications on the What's New page shortly after 1 June 2004.

But I'm not through yet! I recently spoke with Joni Sralla-Turken, Program Administrator for the BoatU.S. Clean Water Grants Program. Joni stated that as of the date of this writing, she has received 15 applications from the Auxiliary, a whopping 400 percent increase of the total received last year!

The deadline isn't here quite yet, and I am personally aware of some units who have not submitted applications. They are literally burning the midnight oil to get their application in via email or postmarked before the 2 February 2004 midnight deadline.

So although it has been a great year for grants, I don't want us to rest on our laurels. I know with everyone's help, we can make 2004 an even more memorable year!

IMPORTANT BOATING DATES FOR 2004

Ed Sweeney, DVC-BR

The following are some key boating safety dates to mark on your calendar **NOW**, and begin to plan accordingly for **TODAY!**

- **IBWSS:** 17-22 April 2004 Panama City, FL
- **National Safe Kids Week:** 1-8 May 2004
- **North American Safe Boating Week:** 22-28 May 2004
- **VSC Mega Month:** 22 May thru 4 July 2004
- **National Marina Day,** 14 August 2004.

One last thing: please remember to post your own local boating safety events on the National Safe Boating Council's web site events page located at <http://www.safeboatingcampaign.com/events/events.htm>



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