

Many steps can be taken to ensure safe boating

Caledon OPP is reminding residents and tourists that being well-informed about provincial safe boating practices and laws can go a long way to ensure an enjoyable and tragedy-free boating season.

The majority of victims who die in fatal boating incidents are not wearing a personal flotation device (PFD) or life-jacket.

Drinking and boating is just as dangerous as drinking and driving and the very same laws that are in place for impaired driving apply to impaired boating as well.

If you suspect that someone is operating a boat while impaired, call 9-1-1. In doing so, you could be saving lives.

Always do a thorough check of your boat and safety equipment before heading out on the water, as mechanical breakdowns account for a significant number of calls for assistance to OPP.

In 2015, OPP investigated 16 fatal boating incidents in which 18 people died. Falling overboard, capsized or swamped vessels, speed and alcohol and failure to wear a life-jacket or PFD were all contributing factors in the fatalities.

Some people feel safe just having them on board. What they fail to recognize is that many dangerous boating incidents happen quickly and there may not be enough time to grab a PFD. By the time people realize they need them, more often than not, it's too late. Police added other people don't wear them because they think PFDs and lifejackets are uncomfortable and will take away from their boating enjoyment. The reality is that PFDs and life-jackets have come a long way and are designed with comfort in mind. A Canadian approved standard life-jacket, when worn properly, is designed to turn an unconscious person from face down to face up in the water and allows them to breath. A Canadian approved PFD is designed to keep one afloat in the water and are designed for use in recreational boating. They are generally smaller, less bulky and more comfortable than lifejackets.

Boaters caught drinking and boating in Ontario face similar consequences to those caught drinking and driving. This includes:

? losing their licence for a year if convicted under the Criminal Code for having a Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) that exceeds 0.08,

? mandatory alcohol assessment, education or treatment and follow-up,

? ignition interlock condition to their driver's licence,

? vehicle impoundment if caught driving a motor vehicle while under suspension.

Boaters also face an immediate licence suspension for having a BAC in the ?warn range? of 0.05 to 0.08 mg. of alcohol in 100 ml. of blood.

These laws apply to anyone who is caught drinking and operating motorized and non-motorized vessels, including power boats, canoes, kayaks, personal watercraft, sailboats, dinghies and other inflatable boats and rafts.

The provincial laws regarding alcohol on boats do not permit any open alcohol to be available or consumed by anyone onboard the boat while it is underway. Only boats which have sleeping, washroom and cooking facilities integrated into their design may legally have open alcohol on-board but only when the boat is being used as a residence; for instance, when it is anchored or tied to a dock. Being well-prepared is the key to safe and enjoyable boating.

Check the boat. Be familiar with the boat being operated. Check the condition of the vessel and ensure it is properly prepared for the boating season.

Be prepared. Mechanical breakdowns account for a significant number of calls for assistance to OPP. Most of these embarrassing incidents are preventable by ensuring the vessel is serviceable and that there is a sufficient amount of gas. Part of being prepared is also making sure that the weather and water conditions are suitable for a day out on the water.

Plan ahead. Remember when things go wrong on the water, they happen very quickly, without time to react. A prudent skipper always discusses his or her plans with a family member before they set out.

The Canadian Red Cross and Transport Canada have excellent information about PFDs and lifejackets on their websites. Some helpful links are www.tc.gc.ca/eng/marinesafety/debs-obs-equipment-lifejackets-information-1324.htm and www.redcross.ca/what-we-do/swimming-and-water-safety/swimming,-boating-and-water-safety-tips/lifejackets-and-pfds