

Think twice before you decide to drink and boat this season

By Ian Gilson

Canadian Safe Boating Council

Drinking and boating continues to be a factor in approximately 40 per cent of boating-related fatalities.

An IPSOS-REID study commissioned by the Canadian Safe Boating Council and conducted in 2014 cited some disturbing perceptions among boaters who drink and boat, at least occasionally. These included perceptions that it's not dangerous to drink and boat; drinking while boating is just part of the overall relaxing experience; and the chances of getting caught are extremely remote. The first two of these suggest that we as boaters need to be better educated on the dangers of drinking and boating.

It's been proven that the combination of sun, wind and rocking motion of the boat significantly increases the intoxicating effects of alcohol. Not only are one's senses dulled but so is their ability to safely operate a boat. Reduced inhibitions often also lead to people taking risks that they wouldn't normally engage in, like operating their boat at speeds unsafe for the conditions or letting passengers sit on the bow of the boat with their legs hanging over the edge while the boat is in motion. It's all too often forgotten as well that, we as boat operators, are responsible for the safety of everyone on board. A good question to ask yourself is how you would feel if someone you love was hurt or killed as a result of your boating while impaired.

With respect to the chances of getting caught drinking and boating being extremely remote, the probabilities in 2015 have increased significantly based on two initiatives that will be in full swing this season.

The first is called Operation Dry Water, which was initiated by the Canadian Safe Boating Council in 2013 and has progressively gained momentum to the point where it should be in full swing across Canada this upcoming season. It runs during the August long weekend and involves police agencies making increased vessel checks to both educate boaters on the dangers of drinking and boating and to enforce their local laws relating to the practice.

The second is called Help Us Catch Impaired Boaters ? Dial 9-1-1. It was introduced in 2014 across most of Canada, again by the Canadian Safe Boating Council, and eagerly received by police and 9-1-1 agencies alike. The intent of the initiative is to both act as a preventive influence and to empower everyone on the water to report instances of suspected impaired boating.

Make this season one in which you'll decide to leave your beer on the pier for when you return. It will not only be nice and cold but it'll go well with your stories of your trophy catch or breathtaking scenery.