

## **Alcohol and Boating Can Be Deadly**

Ahh, boating ! Skimming over the water with the wind in your hair. What a great way to spend a summer afternoon, especially with family and friends. A carefree atmosphere like this is just made to have fun and party. However, this partying should never include drinking alcohol. Mixing alcohol and boating can have tragic consequences.

When the Canadian Safe Boating Council and SmartBoater.ca speak to Canadian boaters each year during Safe Boating Awareness Week, which runs from May 21<sup>st</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup>, and throughout the entire boating season about the dangers of alcohol and boating, there is no gentle way to say it. Being impaired while operating a boat can cost you thousands of dollars, or worse, turn a fun day into a deadly outing! ((OR A ONE WAY TRIP))

Federal statutes dictate that, whether or not your craft is motorized, you can be charged with Impaired Operation of a vessel under the Criminal Code of Canada if your blood alcohol level exceeds the .08 threshold. That means you can be charged even if you are impaired while operating a canoe and a judge can, upon conviction, suspend your boating privileges, but it can get worse.

Many provinces have enacted additional legislation to curb the practice of drinking and boating. In Ontario for example, Bill 209 amended the Highway Traffic Act to also apply to “*anyone operating or having the care or control of a vessel*”. As such, anyone found boating with a blood alcohol level above .05, face an on-the-spot drivers’ license suspension. That’s right! You can lose your automobile driver’s licence and should your blood alcohol concentration exceed .08, upon conviction an additional suspension of up to one year can be applied.

If that’s not a sufficient deterrent, add the financial impact of court and legal fees, alternative transportation for the year (i.e. taxi, bus, train, etc.) and potential loss of employment if driving is an essential component of your job. The costs keep mounting even after the reinstatement of your license. You’ll face drastically increased insurance premiums for up to 6 years and the inconvenience and embarrassment related to the installation and use of an ignition interlock system. These costs can easily amount to many thousands of dollars! The decision to drink and boat seems pretty stupid when stacked up against these penalties!

But many impaired boaters are not stopped before something even worse happens. The Canadian Safe Boating Council completed a survey that identified in nearly 40% of boating related deaths alcohol was a factor and 23% of the cases involved alcohol above the legal limit.

What increased the effects of alcohol in a boat are sunshine and a boat’s natural rocking motion that can turn a simple ride can turn into a dangerous dunking. It only takes a large wake or wave, a quick change in the boat’s direction, or a ‘tippy canoe’ to result in someone falling overboard with tragic consequences.

Navigating a boat takes coordination and your full concentration. Your decision making skills and ability to react suddenly to changes in condition and surroundings is compromised by alcohol. Your reaction time slows, your vision and judgement are affected and you are more willing to be reckless and take risks. All of this can result in a preventable accident in which you or someone you care for ends up in hospital or worse.

Psychologists know that human nature has a way of rationalizing. "It can't possibly happen to me" is often the thought. Whether that means "I'll never be caught" or "I'll never be killed" doesn't matter.

Neither of those things will happen if boaters stick to just boating on the water. Afterward, you can have a few drinks on shore and then stay put.

It's that simple - If you drink, don't drive your boat.

For more information on safe and responsible boating practices visit Canada's educational boating website [www.smartboater.ca](http://www.smartboater.ca)