

2017

Boating Accidents Statistical Report



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Division of Law Enforcement

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2017 Boating Officer of the Year



Officer Megan Malicoat

Officer Megan Malicoat has worked with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) for four years and is assigned to Volusia County. She is a leader in her county for working water patrol hours, and she excels at working with others. Officer Malicoat effectively utilizes tools and equipment to be more efficient in her patrols, which allows her to successfully work diverse activities in her area.

She is an integral part in continuing to build upon FWC's strong working relationships with the U.S. Coast Guard at Station Ponce Inlet, the Volusia County Sheriff's Office, and local police departments throughout the county. Over the past year, she has worked with these departments through a number of operational details targeting boating safety and special events. One such detail focused on marine sanitation devices (MSD) where FWC and Volusia Sheriff's Department worked together to inspect vessels for MSD's and compliance with regulations for those systems. There were over 160 vessels checked resulting in 17 warnings and 12 arrests for violations. She has also participated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service in enhanced boating safety and hunting enforcement details.

Officer Malicoat conducted over 1,850 hours of boating safety enforcement. She is a certified breath test operator and participated in a boating safety detail for an event called "Beerpalooza." She made two boating under the influence (BUI) arrests, and assisted in the investigation of three BUIs by operating the breathalyzer.

Megan has responded to many boating accidents in Volusia County and completed the reports for seven accidents. This represents over 40% of the reportable accidents in her county. She also participated in multiple search and rescues. During one search and rescue, a woman had launched her kayak and ventured out into the lagoon. When the weather deteriorated, the woman became disoriented and was unable to find her way out of the marsh canals. The woman called for assistance, and Officer Malicoat was able to calm her down while directing her through the canals. Malicoat located the woman and safely transported her back to the boat ramp.

2017 Boating Educator of the Year



Andrea Rutherford

Andrea Rutherford was selected as the 2017 Boating Educator of the Year. Andrea has been a Coast Guard Auxiliarist since 1992, filling numerous leadership positions at both the Flotilla and Division level. Andrea has been teaching boating safety classes for 24 years, applying many of the skills from her Ph.D. in Education to improve course delivery.

Andrea consistently takes extra responsibilities in the Flotilla including organizing and training instructors, coordinating with the Flotilla's Public Affairs Officer for promotional ads, following up with students, keeping numerous courses updated with current materials and legislation, teaching various courses, and following up with students. While the Flotilla normally teaches classes at their base in Spanish River Park, Boca Raton, she extended the outreach to include other venues, including the Tropic Bay Marine Community and Lynn University. She also coordinated annual boating safety and other skills training for local Naval Sea Cadets.

Andrea forged a partnership with the AustinBlu Foundation to provide funding to offer free boating safety classes. Andrea used social media, local news media, and other avenues to publicize the availability of the classes. The large outreach effort drew students from three area counties. Over the six month grant period, Flotilla 36 taught 91 students, including 28 teens.

Although the grant funding was exhausted in August 2016, Andrea convinced her Flotilla leadership to continue offering the boating safety class free for teens 12-19 years until the end of 2016, and at a reduced cost in 2017, resulting in an additional 20 teenage students being trained. Andrea has continued to promote and appreciate the AustinBlu Foundation for their efforts to increase boating education for teens. The results of Andrea's efforts are best measured by the success of the program. In 2016, 157 students graduated from Flotilla 36 courses. This included 40 teens, a 50% increase as compared to 2015 students receiving the Florida Boating Safety ID Card.

INTRODUCTION

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), powered by science-based leadership, is committed to creating a sustainable and healthy future for Florida's fish, wildlife, water and habitat resources. The FWC serves Floridians and visitors alike in a variety of ways, most of which revolve around our mission of managing fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people. The Division of Law Enforcement (DLE) is perhaps the most visible tool within the FWC's "tool belt" used to meet its goal of providing healthy resources for safe, satisfied customers.

THE DIVISION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

Roles and Mission

The FWC is the only state agency in Florida tasked with the management of the state's fish and wildlife resources. As a primary responsibility, the FWC's Division of Law Enforcement focuses on enforcing regulations aimed at protecting and sustaining these resources both for their long-term well-being and the benefit of Florida's residents and visitors, all the while blending in its unique and specialized public safety role. The Division's mission is clear... "Protecting Florida's natural resources and people through proactive and responsive law enforcement services."

Responsibilities

The FWC Division of Law Enforcement provides protection to those who enjoy Florida's natural resources, while also enforcing resource protection and boating safety laws. Officers patrol rural, wilderness, inshore and offshore areas, and where other law enforcement agencies do not routinely patrol. FWC officers have the authority to enforce all the laws of the state and are cross-deputized to enforce federal fisheries and wildlife laws.

In the course of carrying out their broad responsibilities, FWC officers seek every opportunity to educate and introduce Floridians and visitors to the wonders of Florida's fish, wildlife, and natural resources, as well as safe boat operation and safety equipment requirements.

The Division also provides general law enforcement services as part of Florida's statewide emergency response network. Because of their unique jurisdiction and specialized training and equipment, FWC is also charged with protecting the state's waterways and critical infrastructure during times of heightened security threat levels. As seasoned first responders, FWC officers are trained to move fast and efficiently.

Moving forward into the future, FWC will continue to pursue and apply advances in technology to improve response to both conservation and general law enforcement incidents. When duty calls, FWC will always be among the first to respond, providing aid as needed. Until then, FWC will continue to lead the way in natural resource protection, proactive boating safety law enforcement and education are what we do best.

Uniquely prepared

On the water, in the woods and in the air, FWC law enforcement officers are uniquely situated and equipped to identify and respond to illegal activity and promote public safety, particularly in the maritime and wilderness areas.

Core Missions

The FWC protects Florida's people and natural resources. The Division of Law Enforcement is an integral part of the agency and is vital in fulfilling the agency's responsibilities. These core missions reflect the unique capabilities, training and equipment our personnel use to achieve those responsibilities.

Resource Protection and

Access: State and federal fisheries and wildlife law enforcement. Threatened and endangered species protection. Captive and nonnative wildlife management. Habitat protection. Investigations. Education and outreach programs developing the next generation that cares.

Environmental Protection:

State and federal environmental law enforcement. Cultural and natural resources protection and preservation. State lands and water quality protection. Investigations. Education and outreach programs developing the next generation that cares.

Boating and Waterways:

Boating rules and regulation enforcement. Boating safety campaigns and education. Access to public waters. Waterway management and accurate signage. Boating accident investigations. Derelict vessel prevention and investigation. Vessel theft and title fraud investigation.

Public Safety: Provide a safe experience for residents and visitors engaged in outdoor activities. Interagency support and coordination. Specialized response units. Disaster response. Search and rescue. Intelligence and security. General and specialized law enforcement services. Critical incident investigations.

Intervention equals prevention on the water

FWC officers help to ensure Floridians and visitors are safe when they are on the water. The FWC accomplishes this through proactive law enforcement, initiating boating safety and fisheries inspections, and identifying and minimizing potential navigation or environmental hazards in the waterways.

FWC's Boating and Waterways Section supports officer efforts by coordinating statewide boating safety efforts. Some examples of support include education campaigns, ensuring waterway markers are accurate and maintained, permitting and marking speed-regulated areas, coordinating initiatives aimed at removing derelict vessels and improving public boating access.

With close to a million vessels, Florida leads the nation in the number of vessels registered in a state. As a negative consequence of high vessel numbers and our mild climate, Florida also has the highest number of boating fatalities in the nation annually. The vast size of our inland, coastal and offshore patrol areas combined with a significant population of avid and diverse boaters, presents a unique and daunting challenge for FWC and our local and federal maritime enforcement partners.

Boating education is critical

The 2017 Boating Accidents Statistical Report indicates there were 766 reportable boating accidents and 67 boating related fatalities in the calendar year. This total includes three missing persons who at the end of 2017 have not been located or accounted for and their circumstances suggest that death or serious injury has occurred. Many of the deaths were due to victims falling overboard and drowning. A large number of the deaths could have been prevented if the victims had worn life jackets. FWC continues efforts to reduce the number of boating-related fatalities through education about the importance of wearing life jackets while boating.

Florida's current boating safety education law only applies to boaters born on or after January 1, 1988 operating a motorized vessel of 10 horsepower or greater. The face-to-face contacts by FWC officers and our partner agencies are a critical part of our outreach efforts and education to the boating public. These statistics show us that the boat operator most likely to be involved in a boating accident is a middle-age or older male who has boating experience yet has never learned the most important safety considerations by having taken a boating safety course. When officers observe boating violations or perform fresh and saltwater resource enforcement activities, they conduct boating safety inspections aimed at both identifying and preventing violations or accidents. FWC officers make boating safer and ultimately save lives.

Safe boating is a choice

Florida is the leader in promoting boating accident prevention. The FWC, in association with the National Safe Boating Council, Bombardier Recreational Products Inc., West Marine, and the USCG has launched a statewide boating safety campaign as part of a national initiative. The "Wear It Florida" campaign encourages boaters to wear life jackets anytime they are on the water and educates boaters about the ease and convenience of inflatable life jackets. The campaign is designed to reach the public through a variety of methods including media events, exhibits, personal contacts, social media, radio and televised public service announcements.

--- Division of Law Enforcement Values ---

Integrity

We value candor, honesty and the highest standards of ethical behavior and are committed to upholding our positions of public trust.

Professionalism

We value the skillful performance which demonstrates a clear sense of commitment and direction in an environment that encourages teamwork and innovation.

Dedication

We value the motivation and dedication with which our members serve the visitors and residents of Florida.

Adaptability

We value our unique capability to adapt and respond appropriately to diverse circumstances in all environments.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The 2017 Boating Accidents Statistical Report is compiled by the Boating and Waterways Section of the FWC's Division of Law Enforcement. Most of the data contained in this report is gathered from boating accident investigative reports submitted by FWC officers and our marine law enforcement partners.

At the end of each calendar year, boating accident data is compiled and assembled into Florida's annual report. The FWC's Boating and Waterways Section analyzes this information and uses it to formulate proactive plans aimed at reducing the number of boating accidents and their related injuries, fatalities and property damage. This information is also reported to the USCG's Boating Safety Division in Washington, D.C., to be included in the national database consisting of data from all U.S. states and territories.

The statistics reflect data from "reportable boating accidents" that occurred in Florida. Boating accidents must meet at least one of the five criteria below to be classified as reportable:

- A person dies.
- A person disappears under circumstances that indicate possible death or injury.
- A person receives an injury requiring medical treatment beyond immediate first aid.
- There is at least \$2,000 aggregate property damage to the vessel(s) or other property.
- There is a total loss of a vessel.

The number of vessels registered in Florida increased slightly in 2017. With 944,162 registered vessels, Florida leads the nation in registered vessels. Additionally, it is estimated that up to one million non-registered vessels actively use Florida's waters, and this segment of the boating population appears to still be growing. Our waterways show the strains of congestion as each year brings more residents and visitors together to utilize our abundant water resources and enjoy Florida's boating lifestyle.



2017 SUMMARY

BOATING ACCIDENT REVIEW

- Florida leads the nation with a total number of **944,162** registered vessels in 2017.
- There were a total of **766** reportable boating accidents in 2017.

REPORTABLE BOATING ACCIDENT

- Collision with vessel was the leading type of accident with a total of **220 (29%)**.
- Towed watersport activities were involved in **15 accidents**, resulting in **two fatalities and 12 injuries**.
- Paddlecraft (canoes, kayaks, rowboats, paddleboards) were involved in **8 accidents** resulting in **seven fatalities** and **two injuries**.
- **July** was the month with the highest number of accidents (**113**).
- Monroe County reported the highest number of accidents and injuries (96 total accidents with six fatalities and 58 injuries).

REPORTABLE BOATING FATALITIES

- **61 fatal accidents** for 2017 resulting in **67 fatalities**.
- **41%** of the fatal accidents were **falls overboard** (25 accidents). Boaters falling overboard remains the leading type of boating fatality.
- **The leading cause of death** in fatal boating accidents was **drowning** with **35 fatalities (52%)**.
- **July** was the deadliest month in 2017 with **12 fatalities**.
- Alcohol or drug-use is reported to have played a role in **24%** boating fatalities.
- **90% (60)** of the victims of fatal boating accidents were **males**.
- **75% (54)** of the 72 operators involved in fatal accidents were **age 36 or older**.
- **74% (53)** of all vessels involved in fatal accidents in 2017 were **21 feet in length or less**.

REPORTABLE BOATING INJURIES

- There were **766 accidents** resulting in **437 injuries**. The rate of injury was 46 injuries per 100,000 registered vessels.

REPORTABLE PERSONAL WATERCRAFT ACCIDENTS

- Personal watercraft (PWC) accounted for 13% of all registered vessels in Florida.
- PWC were involved in 20% (151) of reportable boating accidents.
- **Rented PWC** represented **47% (96)** of PWC involved in accidents.
- **42% (63)** of PWC accidents involved a **collision with another vessel**.
- 40% of PWC accidents occurred in Monroe (22), Miami-Dade (21), and Pinellas (17) counties.
- **11 fatalities** resulted from the 151 PWC accidents.

BOATING EDUCATION STATISTICS

- FWC issued 48,301 Boating Safety Education ID Cards in 2017.
- 67% of the cards were issued to persons born on or after January 1, 1988.
- Of the 48,301 cards issued, 35,153 were issued to males, 13,148 were issued to females. An additional 1,049 cards were printed for lost, damaged and information changes.
- **67%** of the **operators** involved in fatal accidents had **no formal boater education**.

Boating accident statistics for 2017 were compiled on March 13, 2018. Reports received after that date are not included in the following data. In 2017, there were three missing persons reported. There has not been any updated information as to their status. The three missing persons have been included in the fatality data.