



2009 Boating Accidents Statistical Report



**Florida Fish and Wildlife
Conservation Commission**
Division of Law Enforcement

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 is perhaps the most visible tool within the FWC’s “toolbelt” 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 with primary responsibility for the management of the state’s fish and wildlife resources. The FWC’s Division of Law Enforcement is tasked with 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. Our 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,

Core Missions: The core missions of the Division of Law Enforcement are evident every day in everything we do. We meet critical needs within our state, each of which is identified within our core missions.





Core Mission 1:

Resource protection, including the protection of Florida's fish, wildlife and habitats to ensure their long term well-being and continued viability for educational, recreational and commercial activities.

and places where other law enforcement agencies do not routinely patrol. Our officers have the authority to enforce all laws of the state and are cross-deputized to enforce federal fisheries and wildlife laws.

Yet, in the course of carrying out these broad responsibilities, FWC officers take every opportunity to educate and introduce even the youngest Floridians to the wonders of our state's wildlife and natural resources and some very important boating safety topics.

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

As we look to the future, we will continue to pursue and apply advances in technology to improve the way we respond to both conservation and general law enforcement incidents. When duty calls, we will always be among the first to respond, providing aid as needed. Until then, natural resource protection and 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 address illegal activity and promote public safety, particularly in the maritime and wilderness areas.

Our officers often encounter criminal activity unrelated to natural resources while on patrol. With statewide law enforcement authority, they are able to address violations immediately – serving as a force multiplier for local jurisdictions.

With our combined talent, tools and training, we bring a wide variety of capabilities and experience to any environment. Our aviation assets, equipped with specialized technology, are often used in search, rescue and recovery efforts to provide immediate impact assessments, aerial observation and monitoring of events or incidents, and to deliver critical, life-saving supplies and response personnel to disaster sites. Specially trained canine teams track lost or stranded victims

and wanted persons. Our Special Operations Group (SOG) team members are trained to search for missing or wanted persons in the roughest and most remote areas of the state.

Every day, we work hard to ensure the FWC Division of Law Enforcement is synonymous with excellence.

Working in such diverse environments can be tough and challenging, but FWC law enforcement officers are set apart by their can-do attitude and adaptable nature. When it comes to the woods and water, FWC officers are clearly Florida's experts.

Intervention equals prevention on the water

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

Our Boating, Waterways and Field Services Section supports officer efforts by coordinating statewide boating safety efforts, education campaigns, ensuring waterway markers are accurate and maintained, permitting and marking speed-regulated areas, coordinating the removal of derelict vessels and providing more public boating access sites.

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

Boating education is critical

As evidenced in this 2009 Boating Accidents Statistical Report, there were 620 reportable boating accidents and 65 boating related fatalities. Many of these deaths were due to victims falling overboard or capsizing their boat and drowning. A large number of these deaths could have been prevented if the victims had worn life jackets. We continue to increase our efforts to reduce the number of boating-

Core Mission 2: Boating and waterways, which involves expanding boating and waterways enforcement activities to enhance access to Florida's waters and promote safe boating.

Core Mission 3:

Maritime and wilderness law enforcement patrol, which includes providing maritime and wilderness law enforcement patrol services to enhance public safety in areas rarely patrolled by other law enforcement agencies.

related fatalities through enhanced enforcement and education about the importance of wearing life jackets on the water.

With Florida’s current boating safety education law applying to boaters born on or after January 1, 1988, the face-to-face contacts by FWC officers and our partner agencies are a critical part of our outreach efforts 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 plenty of boating experience yet has never learned the most important safety considerations by having taken a boating safety course. When officers perform fresh and saltwater resource enforcement activities, they also routinely conduct boating safety inspections aimed at both identifying and preventing violations. They 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., the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and a growing list of other partners, 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 the newer types of inflatable life jackets. The campaign reaches the public through a variety of methods including media events, exhibits, personal contacts and tele-



vised public service announcements.

About this report

This 2009 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 working for local agencies.

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 these statistics and uses the information 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.

These statistics reflect data from "reportable boating accidents" that occurred in our state. Boating accidents must involve at least one of the following incidents for it 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, or, there is at least \$2,000 aggregate property damage to the vessel(s) or other property.

The number of recreational vessels registered in the State of Florida fell slightly in 2009. With 982,470 registered vessels, Florida still leads the nation in registered vessels. Additionally, it is estimated that up to 1 million non-registered boats actively use Florida's waters, and this segment of the boating population has been growing rapidly. Our waterways increasingly show the strains of congestion as each year brings more residents and visitors to utilize our abundant water resources and enjoy the Florida boating lifestyle.

Anyone having questions concerning this report should visit www.MyFWC.com and follow the link to "Ask FWC."



Core Mission 4: Mutual aid and emergency response, which calls for enhancing our all-hazards emergency response, prevention and protection capabilities through coordinated efforts with our local, state and federal mutual aid partners.



2009 FLORIDA BOATING ACCIDENT STATISTICAL REPORT

SUMMARY

Boating Accident Review

- Total number of **registered vessels** in Florida continues to lead the nation with 982,470 registered in 2009 (27,889 below 2008 records).
- There were 620 total reportable boating accidents in 2009.

2009 Reportable Boating Accidents

- 70% of the **Operators** involved in reportable boating accidents had no formal boater education.
- Monroe County reported the **highest number of accidents and injuries** (77 total accidents with 3 fatalities and 52 injuries).

2009 Reportable Boating Fatalities

In 2009 boaters falling overboard was the main cause of boating fatalities. This trend, although preventable, continues to grow.

- **39%** of the fatal accidents were falls overboard (20 accidents).
- 52% of the fatal accidents were in vessels less than 18 feet in length.
- The **leading cause of death** in fatal boating accidents was drowning (69%).
- Deadliest month in 2009 was July with 8 fatalities.
- 18.5% of the boating **fatalities were caused** by alcohol or drug use.
- 74% of the victims of fatal boating accidents were males (48).
- The total fatality count for 2009 is reported as 65.
- 18% (9) of the fatal accidents involved non-motorized vessels.

2009 Reportable Boating Injuries

- There were 620 accidents resulting in 426 injuries. The rate of injury was .69.





2009 Reportable Personal Watercraft Accidents

- Personal watercraft (PWC) account for 13% of all registered vessels in Florida.
- PWC were involved in 23% (143) of reported boating accidents.
- 50% of **PWC accidents involved** a collision with another vessel.
- Over 34% of **PWC accidents occurred** in Monroe, Pinellas and Bay Counties, with Monroe County ranked as number #1 (with 25 accidents).

2009 Boating Education Statistics

- FWC issued 20,853 Boater Education ID cards in 2009.
- 51.4% of the cards were issued to persons 21 years of age or younger.