

Boating Accidents Statistical Report 2012



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission



Division of Law Enforcement

BOATING ACCIDENTS STATISTICAL REPORT

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 "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 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. 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 areas 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.



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.

Core mission 2:

Boating and waterways, which involves enhancing the boating safety and waterway experience through improved access, management, and enforcement.

Core mission 3:

Public safety, safeguarding and enriching the outdoor experience of our citizens and visitors, to include providing efficient emergency response to critical incidents and natural disasters through mutual aid efforts with our local, state, and federal partners.

BOATING ACCIDENTS STATISTICAL REPORT

In the course of carrying out broad responsibilities, FWC officers seek every opportunity to educate and introduce Floridians and visitors to the wonders of our state's wildlife, natural resources, and some very important boating safety topics.

The Division also provides general law enforcement services as part of Florida's statewide emergency response network. Because of our 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, 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 respond to 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. They provide immediate impact assessments, aerial observation and monitoring of events or incidents, and 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.



FWC 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.

BOATING ACCIDENTS STATISTICAL REPORT

Every day, we work to ensure the excellence within the FWC Division of Law Enforcement. Working in such diverse environments can be challenging, but FWC law enforcement officers are set apart by their unique capabilities, 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. The FWC accomplishes this through proactive law enforcement, initiating boating safety and fisheries inspections, and identifying and minimizing potential navigation and environmental hazards in the waterways.

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

With close to a million vessels, Florida leads the nation in the number of vessels registered in a state. A negative consequence of high vessel numbers and our mild climate, Florida 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

This 2012 Boating Accidents Statistical Report indicates there were 704 reportable boating accidents and 55 boating related fatalities in the calendar year. Many of these deaths were due to victims falling overboard 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-related fatalities through education about the importance of wearing life jackets while boating.



2012 Boating Educator of the Year

The FWC selected Samuel Boyd of Flotilla 14-01, District 7 of the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary, as Florida's 2012 Boating Educator of the Year.

The award recognizes those in the field of boating education who go above and beyond to engage both new and current boaters in safe boating practices. The nominees raise safe boating awareness by making boating education initiatives relevant, thorough, and exciting.

Sam has been part of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary located in Amelia Island for 12 years. His passion for boating safety and his efforts with the Coast Guard Auxiliary enable him to reach out and educate members of the boating public.

Since 2003, Sam has made it a priority to educate the youth in Northeast Florida and Southeast Georgia about safety practices both in and around water. He continually updates an hour-long course that the flotilla offers to elementary schools, specifically third grades, in the area surrounding Amelia Island. In 2011 alone this course was taught to over 650 children.

Sam Boyd is a valuable partner to the FWC. He is thoroughly involved with boating safety education and training at all levels. He is an exemplary member of the boating safety education effort.

BOATING ACCIDENTS STATISTICAL REPORT

Florida's current boating safety education law only applies 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 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 perform fresh and saltwater resource enforcement activities, they routinely conduct boating safety inspections aimed at both identifying and preventing violations. 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 U.S. Coast Guard (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 the relatively unknown inflatable life jackets. The campaign reaches the public through a variety of methods including media events, exhibits, personal contacts, radio and televised public service announcements.



FWC Receives National Awards

At the 2012 National Association of State Boating Law Administrator's Conference, FWC received two prestigious awards.

The "Innovations" award recognizes initiatives that advance boating safety. It was presented to the FWC for its Statewide At-Risk Vessel Application. Abandoned and derelict boats are eyesores in our beautiful waterways and pose safety, navigational and environmental hazards. Phil Horning manages the program and accepted the award on behalf of the agency. His hard work has helped improve Florida's waters, strengthened partnerships with local agencies and presented public outreach opportunities.

Capt. Richard Moore received the "William B. Garner National Boating Safety Leadership" award. This award recognizes individuals with exceptional vision, persistence and willingness to go beyond the status quo, and whose actions have impacted recreational boating safety at the national level. Captain Moore, Florida's Boating Law Administrator, has taken the lead in representing the boating safety interests of Florida at both the state and national levels.

BOATING ACCIDENTS STATISTICAL REPORT

About this report

The 2012 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 U.S. Coast Guard's Division of Auxiliary and Boating Safety 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 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, or
- There is a total loss of a vessel

The number of vessels registered in the State of Florida declined slightly in 2012. With 901,969 registered vessels, Florida is poised to once again lead the nation in registered vessels. Additionally, it is estimated that up to 1 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 residents and visitors together to utilize our abundant water resources and enjoy Florida's boating lifestyle.



Report Submission

In 2011, officers began using the Boating Accident Report Form located in the mobile forms on their computers and transmitting them electronically. The percentage of electronic boating accident report submissions from FWC officers increased from a 68% submission rate in 2011 to a 97% submission rate in 2012.

The use of electronic boating accident reports has made the reporting process much quicker and easier for our officers. Both the increase in the speed of reporting and the submission rate has given FWC's Boating and Waterways Section an opportunity to produce more accurate reports and statistics for the current year as it progresses.

Having a more accurate read on statistics allows for the creation of boating safety initiatives in smaller, localized areas. The quarterly reports can help identify trends across the state and are provided to FWC officers as information to help direct their daily boating safety patrols.

For electronic access to this report, visit: www.MyFWC.com/boating/safety-education/boating-accidents

BOATING ACCIDENTS STATISTICAL REPORT

SUMMARY

BOATING ACCIDENT REVIEW

- Florida continues to lead the nation with a total number of 901,969 **registered vessels** in 2012.
- There were a total of 704 reportable boating accidents in 2012.

2012 REPORTABLE BOATING ACCIDENTS

- Monroe County reported the **highest number of accidents and injuries** (100 total accidents with 5 fatalities and 61 injuries).

2012 REPORTABLE BOATING FATALITIES

- **42%** of the fatal accidents were **falls overboard** (22 accidents). In 2012, boaters falling overboard remained the main cause of boating fatalities.
- The **leading cause of death** in fatal boating accidents was drowning (62%).
- The deadliest month in 2012 was July with 10 fatalities.
- **Alcohol or drug-use** played a role in 11% of boating fatalities.
- 91% of the victims of fatal boating accidents were males (50).
- The **total fatality count** for 2012 is reported at 55.
- 63% (37) of the 52 fatal accidents involved operators over the age of 35.
- 32% (19) of all fatal accidents in 2012 involved vessels less than 12 feet in length.

2012 REPORTABLE BOATING INJURIES

- There were **704 accidents resulting in 386 injuries**. The rate of injury was 42.8 injuries per 100,000 vessels.

2012 REPORTABLE PERSONAL WATERCRAFT ACCIDENTS

- Personal watercraft (PWC) accounted for 13% of all registered vessels in Florida.
- PWC were involved in 19% (132) of reportable boating accidents.
- 45% of **PWC accidents involved** a collision with another vessel.
- 40% of **PWC accidents occurred** in Monroe, Pinellas and Miami-Dade Counties.
- 7 fatalities resulted from the 132 PWC accidents.

2012 BOATING EDUCATION STATISTICS

- FWC issued 29,359 **Boating Safety Education ID cards** in 2012.
- 40% of the cards were issued to persons 21 years of age or younger.
- Of the 29,359 cards issued, 22,298 were issued to males, 6,572 were issued to females, and 489 cards did not specify the person's gender.
- 71% of the **operators** involved in fatal accidents had no formal boater education.