

Boating Accidents Statistical Report 2013

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Law Enforcement

www.MyFWC.com



On the Cover

Photo credit: Investigator Daniel Miranda

Boca Chita lighthouse on Boca Chita Key in the Biscayne National Park, Monroe County, Florida

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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, as well as areas where other law enforcement agencies do not routinely patrol. FWC 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 regulation, 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.

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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.

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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 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. As 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

The 2013 Boating Accidents Statistical Report indicates there were 736 reportable boating accidents and 62 boating related fatalities in the calendar year. This total includes eight missing persons who at the end of 2013 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. 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.



2013 Boating Educator of the Year



The FWC selected Henry Cespedes of the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary's Flotilla 67 as Florida's 2013 Boating Educator of the Year. Cespedes has been a dedicated boating safety instructor for over 15 years, teaching courses in both English and Spanish.

Cespedes volunteered 22 of his Saturdays in 2012 to teach boating safety classes and perform other volunteer boating safety duties with the Coast Guard Auxiliary, reaching over 600 boaters. Those days often had him busy from 6:30 a.m. until 5:30 p.m., but he still found time to forward the data to the FWC so the students could receive their Boating Safety Education Identification Cards in a timely manner.

Henry provides a valuable service to the recreational boating community in Miami and beyond. His passion for boating safety education and the impact he has made in the southeast Florida area – one of the busiest recreational boating areas in the world – has undoubtedly made the waterways safer.

Cespedes was also named the Regional Boating Educator for the Southern Region by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA). He was honored at the 2013 NASBLA conference in Boise, Idaho.

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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.



2013 FWC Boating Officer of the Year



Officer Dana Klein has been selected as the 2013 Boating Officer of the Year. Officer Klein has served with FWC for 10 years. In 2012 she logged numerous hours of vessel patrol focusing on boating safety and educating violators about vessel laws.

She excels in the identification and prevention of persons boating under the influence (BUI) and has been called on throughout the state to instruct others. In the summer she made eight BUI cases, two of which carried enhanced penalties for repeat violators. She has coordinated BUI details during large boating events to better utilize enforcement efforts.

Officer Klein has been instrumental in instructing other officers about recognizing and testing operators for impairment. She assisted in instructing classes throughout the state on the new Seated Field Sobriety exercises. She has also attended the Comprehensive and Advanced Boating Accident Investigation courses.

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About this report

The 2013 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 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 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.

The 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
- There is a total loss of a vessel

The number of vessels registered in the State of Florida declined slightly in 2013. With 896,632 registered vessels, Florida is poised to once again lead 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 residents and visitors together to utilize our abundant water resources and enjoy Florida's boating lifestyle.



Colonel Calvin Adams Jr. Director, FWC Division of Law Enforcement



With year-round warm weather and over 12,000 square miles of water including tidal shoreline, rivers, streams, canals and lakes, Florida's boating opportunities are extensive. Millions of people take to Florida's waterways each year. That means our officers and other staff have a big job to do in keeping those people and the resources safe.

We go about this in several different ways. One way is to educate the public about boating safety. We do this through working with other agencies to provide instruction, communicating on the water with boaters, reaching out to the media and conducting presentations about safe boating practices. FWC officers also use enforcement of boating safety regulations to try and improve compliance and lead to safer waterways.

Unfortunately, boating accidents do occur. The FWC investigates accidents and provides other emergency services on the water. FWC officers, along with other law enforcement and emergency personnel, are the first to respond to these critical incidents.

Analysis of boating accident information and management of Florida's waterways are also key responsibilities of FWC staff.

All of these components are part of the FWC's efforts to ensure that Florida remains a prime boating locale for residents and visitors alike.

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

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SUMMARY

BOATING ACCIDENT REVIEW

- Florida continues to lead the nation with a total number of 896,632 **registered vessels** in 2013.
- There were a total of 736 reportable boating accidents in 2013.

2013 REPORTABLE BOATING ACCIDENTS

- Miami-Dade County reported the **highest number of accidents and injuries** (104 total accidents with 4 fatalities and 50 injuries).
- Towed watersport activities were involved in 26 accidents. These accidents resulted in two fatalities and 26 injured persons. PWC were used in seven (27%) of the accidents.
- May was the month with the highest number of accidents.

2013 REPORTABLE BOATING FATALITIES

- **42%** of the fatal accidents were **falls overboard** (22 accidents). Boaters falling overboard remains the main cause of boating fatalities.
- The **leading cause of death** in fatal boating accidents was drowning (74%).
- The deadliest month in 2013 was December with 12 fatalities.
- **Alcohol or drug-use** played a role in 15% of boating fatalities.
- 84% of the victims of fatal boating accidents were males (52).
- The **total fatality count** for 2013 is reported at 62.
- 72% (41) of the 57 operators involved in fatal accidents were over the age of 35.
- 49% (29) of all fatal accidents in 2013 involved vessels 16 feet or less in length.

2013 REPORTABLE BOATING INJURIES

- There were **736 accidents resulting in 420 injuries**. The rate of injury was 47 injuries per 100,000 vessels.

2013 REPORTABLE PERSONAL WATERCRAFT ACCIDENTS

- Personal watercraft (PWC) accounted for 11% of all registered vessels in Florida.
- PWC were involved in 19% (137) of reportable boating accidents.
- 40% of **PWC accidents involved** a collision with another vessel.
- 48% of **PWC accidents occurred** in Monroe, Pinellas and Miami-Dade counties.
- Eight fatalities resulted from the 137 PWC accidents.

2013 BOATING EDUCATION STATISTICS

- FWC issued 36,251 **Boating Safety Education ID Cards** in 2013.
- 43% of the cards were issued to persons 21 years of age or younger.
- Of the 36,251 cards issued, 26,714 were issued to males, 8,613 were issued to females, and 924 cards did not specify the person's gender.
- 63% of the **operators** involved in fatal accidents had no formal boater education.

Boating accident statistics for 2013 were compiled on 3/21/2104. Reports received after that date are not included in the following data. In 2013 there were eight missing persons reported. There has not been any updated information as to their status. The eight missing persons have been included in the fatality data.