

2015

Boating Accidents Statistical Report



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Law Enforcement



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2015 Boating Officer of the Year



Officer Chris Mattson

Officer Chris Mattson was selected as the 2015 Boating Officer of the Year. Chris has served with the FWC for 14 years. In 2014, he logged many hours of vessel patrol hours focusing on boating safety, boating under the influence (BUI), derelict vessels and fisheries enforcement. He also organized and participated in several targeted boating safety and BUI enforcement details throughout the year in the Upper Keys.

BUI's are where Chris' passion truly lies. In 2014, Chris became a National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) certified BUI instructor and uses this training to further educate FWC and other agencies on BUI enforcement techniques. In addition, Chris serves as an inspector for the Intoxilyzer 8000, a field training officer and subject matter expert on BUI/DUI enforcement. He was nominated as the region's MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) Officer of the Year, a title he has been awarded in previous years.

Chris is always trying to improve his training and proficiency with regards to the duties and professionalism of an FWC officer. In addition to previously mentioned certifications, he has become a firearms instructor and Glock armorer. Chris is always one of the first to volunteer for extra duties or special events. He has a positive attitude and leads by example in his patrols, enforcement action, and by seeking out continuing education and sharing that knowledge with others.

Chris is regarded as an exemplary officer amongst his peers. He responds to calls quickly, professionally and seeks to gain voluntary compliance through public contact and education. He eagerly assists other officers and takes pride in what he does every day.

2015 Boating Educator of the Year



Brian Rehwinkel

Brian Rehwinkel was selected as the 2015 Boating Educator of the Year. Brian has been working for FWC in the boating safety, outreach, and education arena for 10 years. Brian says that one of the biggest challenges and opportunities he has is informing people of the basic legal requirements while persuading them to develop safe boating practices. Encouraging them to go beyond the simple or minimalist approach of meeting the minimum legal requirements.

He says his greatest achievement is when someone develops a voluntary behavior change, such as a life jacket habit, and attributes that change to an encounter with him either over the phone or in person at an outreach event. This has happened several times in his four years of participating at the Tampa Outdoor Expo. Now, people stop by to tell Brian they have taken a course or bought lifejackets, and wear them, based on speaking with Brian or seeing his inflatable PFD presentation. These people remember him years later and are making a point to talk to him about the impact he made during their earlier encounter. In one case, an individual called Brian half way through a boating education course to tell him how much he is learning and realizing all the things he didn't know.

During Brian's career there have been many changes in boating safety education and outreach. Classes have been trending from the classroom to Internet based learning. Brian is responsible for reviewing and approving the courses of 14 education providers. When he started with FWC, the Florida Boater Education ID Card program issued just over 20,000 cards. In 2014, that number was more than 40,000. He takes pride in the fact that well over half the people who complete a Florida approved boating safety course are not required to do so.

Brian works with a number of groups and organizations to improve boating safety. He has helped coordinate events or outreach with Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation (RBFF), International Convention of Allied Sportfishing Trades (ICAST), International Boating and Water Safety Summit (IBWSS), U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and U.S. Power Squadrons. He personally participates in many outreach events throughout the year, including the Tampa Outdoor Expo, Miami Boat Show, Creating the Next Generation that Cares, and the Florida Sportsman Boat Show, just to name a few. He has been an active member of the NASBLA Education Committee for seven years and is currently the charge leader concerning PFD labeling changes.

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 (DLE) 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 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 equipment requirements.

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.

As we move into 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.

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, identification and removal. 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.

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 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 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 2015 Boating Accidents Statistical Report indicates there were 737 reportable boating accidents and 55 boating related fatalities in the calendar year. This total includes six missing persons who at the end of 2015 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 our 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 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 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 2015 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 Florida law enforcement 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 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 2015. With 915,713 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.



2015 SUMMARY

BOATING ACCIDENT REVIEW

- Florida leads the nation with a total number of 915,713 **registered vessels** in 2015.
- There were a total of 737 reportable boating accidents in 2015.

REPORTABLE BOATING ACCIDENT

- Collision with vessel was the leading type of accident with a total of 191 (26%).
- Towed watersport activities were involved in 14 accidents, resulting in one fatality and 20 injuries.
- Paddlecraft (canoes, kayaks, rowboats, paddleboards) were involved in 12 accidents resulting in nine fatalities and three injuries.
- May was the month with the highest number of accidents (92).
- Miami-Dade County reported the **highest number of accidents and injuries** (96 total accidents with three fatalities and 74 injuries).

REPORTABLE BOATING FATALITIES

- **52 fatal accidents** for 2015 resulting in **55 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** 35 (64%).
- **February** and **May** were the **deadliest months** in 2015 with eight fatalities each.
- **Alcohol or drug-use** is reported to have played a role in 19% of boating fatalities.
- 95% of the victims of fatal boating accidents were males (52).
- 67% (38) of the 57 operators involved in fatal accidents were age 36 or older.
- 77% (43) of all vessels involved in fatal accidents in 2015 were 21 feet in length or less.

REPORTABLE BOATING INJURIES

- There were **737 accidents resulting in 438 injuries**. The rate of injury was 48 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 22% (161) of reportable boating accidents.
- Rented PWC represented 43% (96) of PWC involved in accidents
- **44%** of PWC accidents involved a **collision with another vessel**.
- 51% of PWC accidents occurred in Miami-Dade (33), Monroe (25), and Pinellas (24) counties.
- Four fatalities resulted from the 161 PWC accidents.

BOATING EDUCATION STATISTICS

- FWC issued 45,669 Boating Safety Education ID Cards in 2015.
- 61% of the cards were issued to persons born on or after January 1, 1988.
- Of the 45,669 cards issued, 29,229 were issued to males, 16,440 were issued to females. An additional 1,641 cards were printed for lost, damaged and information changes.
- **72%** of the **operators** involved in fatal accidents had **no formal boater education**.

Boating accident statistics for 2015 were compiled on 3/31/2016. Reports received after that date are not included in the following data. In 2015, there were six missing persons reported. There has not been any updated information as to their status. The six missing persons have been included in the fatality data.