

2008 Monthly ES&H Campaign: June Safe Boating – It's Up To You!

Monday, 23rd

What is safe boating? Safe boating is boating without a safety, health, or environmental incident spoiling your fun. Unfortunately boating incidents are common, and in 2006 (last available statistics) there were 710 fatalities and 3,474 injuries while boating in the U.S. The use of alcoholic beverages while boating is said to have contributed to about 1 in 5 boating fatalities. **Don't drink and boat.**

What possible health issues are there when boating? A number of people die each year from carbon monoxide poisoning while boating. This odorless/colorless gas is the product of internal combustion engines and this hazard is normally associated with boats at rest, but recent studies show that some boat designs allow CO to enter the boat while underway. Make sure there is sufficient ventilation in the enclosed areas of your boat. Consider installing a CO monitor for the boat it is a wise investment.

Additionally, the potential for damage to your skin from excessive sun exposure while on the water is well documented and easily prevented. Be sure to use an appropriate sunscreen (SPF of 15 or higher is typically recommended) and reapply as needed.

What types of safety problems might be encountered while boating? In 2006 423 people drowned while boating because they were not wearing personal flotation devices (life vests). While the Coast Guard requires life vests to be on board wearing them is the only sure way to prevent drowning. There are other hazards associated with boating including, trauma injuries and fires/explosions while starting or refueling. Hypothermia (a drop in core body temperature) is also a significant hazard if you fall overboard, even in warmer summer waters.

What kind of environmental hazards can boating create? The most common environmental hazard from boating is polluting the water with trash and boating chemicals. Motor oil and gasoline often leak into the water during repairs, and refueling and the misuse of cleaning chemicals degrades the water further. Recycle when possible, eliminate chemical spills through careful attention and preventative maintenance, and never throw trash into the waterways.

Where can you get more information? Taking a boating course offered by the Coast Guard Auxiliary, the US Power Squadron, or other organizations is an excellent way to learn about safe boating. There are numerous sources for safe boating information, including the following:

<http://www.americasboatingcourse.com/>

http://nws.cgaux.org/visitors/pe_visitor/index.html

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/duip/safeboatingweek.htm>

Visit the Communications ES&H website for more information.