



LIFESAVING SOCIETY®  
The Lifeguarding Experts

# BOATING FATALITIES IN CANADA

## 2000 Special Report

Boating deaths in Canada decreased to the lowest total in the past 9 years. During 1998 (the most recent year for which new data is available), there were 187 boating fatalities, down from 192 in 1997, and down by 10% from the average of the previous five years. However boating still accounted for one-third of the 551 total preventable water-related deaths in Canada in 1998.

More people drown in Canadian boating incidents than in all "in-water" incidents combined (e.g. swimming, playing in water, bathing, etc). In total, 988 people died in boating incidents during the five-year period between 1994 and 1998.

Most fatal boating incidents occur during recreational activities (76%). The recreational activities that boating victims were most often participating in were pleasure powerboating (33% of all boating deaths), sport fishing (28%) and canoeing (15%). There was a sharp drop in the number of pleasure powerboating deaths to the lowest level in 9 years of tracking—only 46 deaths in 1998.

The number of canoeing deaths was also down—from 36 in 1996, to 28 in 1997, to only 18 in 1998. While sport fishing boating deaths were up from the low level of 1997, the long-term trend toward fewer fishing deaths continues.

Half of Canadian boating deaths occur on lakes (53%). Ocean incidents (24%) and rivers/streams (21%) account for the balance. By region, one-quarter (25%) of Canadian boating fatalities occurred in Ontario over the past five years; 22% in British Columbia; 17% in Atlantic Canada; 17% in Quebec; 13% in the Prairie provinces; and 5% in the northern Territories.

### WHO'S BOATING?

There are about 10 million boaters in Canada (43% of all Canadians 16+ years of age)<sup>1</sup>. One-quarter of Canadian boaters are owners of Canada's 2.6 million boats<sup>2</sup>. The other three-quarters of Canadian boaters have been out boating during the past two years, although they do not own a boat. Boat owners tend to be male (66%) and a little older than non-boat owners.

### WHO'S MOST AT RISK?

Almost all boating victims are male (92%). Half (47%) of all 1994-1998 boating victims were between 35 and 64 years of age. These older men were often fishing or boating with friends, in a small open powerboat, when their fatal incident occurred. One-third (36%) of all 1994-1998 boating victims were between 18 and 34 years of age. These younger men were usually boating or fishing in a small open motorboat, or canoeing.

### KEY RISK FACTORS INCLUDE NOT WEARING PFDs, ALCOHOL AND LACK OF TRAINING

Boating victims almost never intended to get wet. Most victims fell overboard (27%) or their boat capsized (39%). In such situations, unfortunately they were *almost never wearing their PFD* (personal flotation device) or lifejacket. Only 13% of boating victims were wearing a PFD properly when they drowned. One in 4 victims (25%) *did not even have a PFD in their boat*.

*Alcohol consumption* is involved in 4 of 10 boating fatalities (40%).

In terms of training, only one-third of boat owners had taken a *safe boating course*<sup>1</sup>, prior to the 1999 introduction of boat operator competency regulations. Of those who have taken a course, most (68%) found it *very useful*<sup>1</sup>.

### POWERBOATS AND PERSONAL WATERCRAFT MORE DEADLY THAN UNPOWERED CRAFT

Almost half (45%) of the 2.6 million boats used recreationally in Canada are powerboats, according to Canadian Coast Guard research<sup>2</sup>. A further one-third (36%) are canoes and kayaks. Although growing in popularity, there are still relatively few personal watercraft (50,000 in 1996).

Powerboats account for more than half of all Canadian boating deaths. Small open powerboats under 5.5 metres (18 feet) in length are more often involved than larger powerboats. Canoes are the second most involved craft.

The absolute number of personal watercraft fatalities is low. However relative to the number of craft, the water-related death rate for powerboats and personal watercraft, at 7 and 10 deaths per 100,000 boats respectively, is higher than for unpowered craft (i.e. canoes, sailboats and rowboats) at 4 deaths per 100,000 boats per year. Risk-taking behaviour may be contributing to the higher death rates for powered craft, however, it must also be kept in mind that they are used more intensively than unpowered craft.

	'000's of Boats for Pleasure Use-1996 <sup>2</sup>	Avg. # of Recr. Boating W-R Deaths 1994-1998	W-R Death Rate - # of Deaths/ 100,000 Boats
Powerboats	1,182	85	7
Personal Watercraft	52	5	10
Canoes & Kayaks	965	37	4
Sailboats	124	5	4
Rowboats	294	7	2
Total	2,617	150	5.7

Notes: 1. Source: Canadian Coast Guard, 1995, "Survey of the General Public on Issues Related to Boating".

2. Source: Canadian Coast Guard, 1996, "Small Vessels Inventory in Canada". Includes estimated number of boats for pleasure use in private Canadian households and boats rented for pleasure/recreational use. Estimates are ± 12%.

## BE A WATER SMART® BOATER ... AVOID BOATING RISK FACTORS

### 1) THE RULES HAVE CHANGED!

- No child under 12 years of age may operate a powerboat with more than a 10 HP motor unless accompanied by someone 16 years or older. Similarly, youth 12 to 15 years of age may only operate a boat with a motor over 40 HP if accompanied and directly supervised by someone 16 years or older.
- Minimum age for operating a personal watercraft (PWC) is 16 years of age.
- New small vessel safety equipment and safety precautions requirements for boaters include a new "careless operation of a vessel" offence which requires boaters to travel safely and avoid putting themselves and others at risk.

#### GET CARDED!

- The new Canadian Coast Guard **Pleasure Craft Operator Card (PCO)** is earned by scoring 75% on a test of basic boating safety knowledge.
- Starting September 1999, youth under 16 years of age may not operate a powered recreational boat without the PCO Card, under new federal regulations. In 2002, the regulation affects all operators of powered boats under 4 metres (including PWC). By 2009, the regulation affects all powerboat operators regardless of their age or the size of craft.

### 2) GET TRAINED ON BOATING SAFETY!

- Take a course or study at home and take the test when you're ready. The LIFESAVING SOCIETY's Boat Operator Accredited Training™ course (B.O.A.T.) is available at participating recreation departments and other aquatic facilities.

IT'S THE WATER SMART® THING TO DO!

### 3) KNOW BEFORE YOU GO!

- Avoid potential danger by taking a few minutes with a simple checklist... What's the weather forecast? Any local hazards? Have your maps or charts? Have your PFDs? First aid kit, tools and spare parts? Safety equipment all working? Have enough fuel? Told someone where you are going and when to expect you back?

### 4) ALWAYS WEAR A LIFEJACKET!

- Don't just have it in the boat, pick one and **wear** it ... only 13% of Canadian boating victims were wearing a lifejacket or personal flotation device (PFD) properly; only 1 in 8 powerboat victims and 1 in 6 canoeing victims were wearing a PFD; 1 in 4 boating victims did not even have a PFD in the boat.

### 5) WEAR THE RIGHT GEAR!

- Your PFD of course, but also good sunglasses and appropriate clothing.
- Paddles, whistles and flares are the right gear too.

### 6) BOAT SOBER ... DON'T DRINK AND DRIVE YOUR BOAT!

- Alcohol intensifies the effect of fatigue, sun, wind and boat motion to adversely affect your balance, judgment and reaction time.
- Alcohol is involved in 40% of all Canadian preventable boating fatalities.

### 7) DRIVE YOUR POWERBOAT OR PWC RESPONSIBLY!

- Look before you act, stay low, drive at moderate speeds, be aware of changing weather conditions, and drive with extreme caution and proper lights after dark.
- Capsizing, swamping or falling overboard is involved in three-quarters of fatal boating incidents.

## SUMMARY FACTS & FIGURES

Canadian Boating Water-Related Deaths:  
1994 - 1998 Five-Year Totals

	# (% of Total)	
Total	988	
<b>WHO</b>		
<i>Age of Victim:</i>		
< 18 yrs	72	(7)
18 - 34	350	(35)
35 - 64	461	(47)
65 +	94	(10)
<i>Sex of Victim:</i>		
Male	911	(92)
Female	76	(8)
<b>WHEN</b>		
<i>Month of Year:</i>		
May - June	312	(32)
July - August	301	(30)
September - October	199	(20)
November - April	156	(16)
<b>WHERE</b>		
<i>Aquatic Setting:</i>		
Lake/Pond	520	(53)
Ocean	238	(24)
River/Stream	210	(21)
<i>Province/Territory:</i>		
Nfld	72	(7) Manitoba 37 (4)
N.S.	61	(6) Sask. 43 (4)
P.E.I.	11	(1) Alberta 52 (5)
N.B.	29	(3) B.C. 216 (22)
Quebec	171	(17) N.W.T. 33 (3)
Ontario	249	(25) Yukon 14 (1)
<b>ACTIVITIES MOST OFTEN INVOLVED</b>		
<i>Recreational (1 or 2 specific activities per incident)</i>		
Powerboating	324	(33)
Fishing	278	(28)
Canoeing	145	(15)
Hunting	50	(5)
Sailing	25	(3)
Total Recreational	750	(76)
Daily Living Boat Travel	49	(5)
Vocational (usually commercial fishing)	124	(13)
<b>TYPE OF CRAFT INVOLVED</b>		
<i>Powerboat</i>		
- small (5.5m and under)	328	(33)
- large (over 5.5m)	139	(14)
- size unknown	119	(12)
- personal watercraft	27	(3)
- Total Powerboats	613	(62)
Canoe	189	(19)
Sailboat	25	(3)
Rowboat	43	(4)
<b>WHY - CONTRIBUTING FACTORS</b>		
Fell or thrown overboard	264	(27)
Capsized	389	(39)
Swamped	126	(13)
<i>Absence of PFD:</i>		
PFD not worn (properly)	676	(68)
PFD not present	252	(26)
PFD worn (properly)	128	(13)
PFD information not available	184	(19)
Alcohol Involved	393	(40)
After Dark	207	(21)
Alone	230	(23)
With Others	753	(76)
Rough Water	298	(30)
Standing up in craft	100	(10)
Overloaded craft	90	(9)
Collisions	76	(8)

Published May 2000 by the Lifesaving Society. More information is available in the Society's *National Drowning Report*. Contact the:

LIFESAVING SOCIETY  
287 McArthur Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K1L 6P3  
Telephone: (613) 746-5694; Fax: (613) 746-9929; E-Mail: experts@lifesaving.ca  
Or contact the Lifesaving Society office in your province/territory.

The Lifesaving Society is Canada's lifeguarding expert. The Society is a national, volunteer and charitable organization working to prevent drowning and water-related injury through its training programs, Water Smart® public education, and aquatic safety management services.



