



Autumn Boating Safety

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In cooler weather, pleasure boaters' numbers dwindle and the lakes and rivers play host primarily to hunters and fisherman. Oftentimes these outdoorsmen don't see themselves as "boaters". They are hunters and fishermen. The boat is simply a tool of the trade; viewed as little more than a means to the end of bringing home dinner, a trophy, or a good fish story.

Drowning after a fall overboard is the most common cause of a boating fatality. Hunters and fishermen alone in small boats represent the highest risk of such an occurrence.

Hunters and fishermen rarely recognize the need to take the safe boating classes offered by the Coast Guard Auxiliary or the US Power Squadron. Wearing a Life Jacket is often viewed as an unnecessary encumbrance upon their freedom of movement – which they consider vital in the pursuit of their sport.

Small craft are inherently less stable than larger vessels. Their center of gravity is more easily shifted by minimal movement. A fall overboard can occur easily, even without the contribution of a collision, bad weather, or travel at high speed.

Frequently a man in a small boat will stand up to relieve himself. This raises the center of gravity, sharply reducing the boat's stability. As the boat shifts and rocks, he may lose his balance and fall into the water. At this time of year, the water is cool enough to trigger a gasp reflex upon sudden immersion. Inhaling water, he begins to drown.

Even where cold water immersion shock and hypothermia isn't a factor, a fall of this type still carries a high risk of fatality. Hunters and fisherman spend much of their time in shallow water around standing timber, submerged rocks, and logs; as these are a great habitat in which to locate (or hide from) their quarry. Unfortunately, falling headfirst from a standing position into shallow water around rocks and logs is a very good way to be knocked unconscious and drown. Falling from a standing position, one can also hit their head on the gunwales of their own boat.

While hunters and fisherman will frequently bring along a few beers to drink while they relax and enjoy their activity, drinking alcohol while on the water is ill advised. After a couple of cold-ones, the need to relieve oneself will probably arise. Balance will be impaired. Resistance to hypothermia will be reduced. Judgment will be diminished. This is a deadly mix.

What steps can the hunter and fisherman take to keep safe as they commune with nature?

First and foremost, wear a Coast Guard Approved Life Jacket at all times. Having one on board but stowed under the seat will serve little purpose once you're in the water. There are many types and sizes of approved Life Jacket. You can find one that is comfortable and won't be too restrictive to your movement.

Bring along a suitable receptacle to relieve yourself into, as this is much safer than standing up and going over the rail.

Go with a buddy! It's more fun, and there's someone there to help you if there's a problem. When alone, you could be in serious trouble for a long time before anyone even misses you.

Use a Float Plan. Make sure someone knows where you are, and when you're expected back.

Save the alcohol for when you get home with your catch.

Take a Safe Boating Class and get a Vessel Safety Check. The Coast Guard Auxiliary and US Power Squadron offer both.

Have fun, and come home safe!

To learn more about boater education, Vessel Safety Checks and other services provided by the Coast Guard Auxiliary – or if you are interested in learning how to become one of us – please visit us online at www.uscgauxflotilla3-13.org or contact us at bcz@charter.net.

The United States Coast Guard Auxiliary is composed of uniformed, non-military volunteer civilians who assist the Coast Guard in all of its varied missions, except for military and direct law enforcement. These men and women can be found on the nation's waterways, in classrooms and on the dock, performing safety patrols, vessel safety examinations and public education. The 31,000 members of the Coast Guard Auxiliary donate millions of hours annually in support of Coast Guard missions.