

Washington State Recreational Boating Safety

Press Kit - 2022



Media Contact

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Summer and peak boating season is right around the corner. That's why every May, the Washington State Parks [Boating Program](#), [Coast Guard 13th District](#) and King County Sheriff's Office [Marine Rescue](#) promote the **National Safe Boating Week** campaign to remind people about the importance of safe boating.

[National Safe Boating Week](#), May 21-27, is coordinated each year by the [National Safe Boating Council](#) and boating safety partners across the United States and Canada. The campaign kicks off prior to Memorial Day to encourage boaters to make responsible decisions a daily habit, such as always wearing a life jacket, carrying the right equipment, knowing navigational rules, never boating under the influence and more. [Find resources](#) to promote the campaign.

Over the past few years, participation on outdoor recreation including boating and paddlesports has reached new heights. With all the new people out on the water, boating safety experts encourage safety be front and center all season.

People can learn about and participate in the National Safe Boating Week campaign through social media by using some of the following hashtags: #SafeBoatingWeek #SafeBoating #BoatPrepared #WearIt #WearItWA #SafePaddling #ColdWaterSafety #BoatSober

QUICK FACTS

According to Washington's recreational boating accident data, in 2021:

- 13 people lost their life in a fatal accident.
 - 55% of those fatal accidents occurred on human powered watercraft.
 - Only two people had a boater education card.
 - 77% of victims were not wearing a life jacket.
 - Two fatalities were confirmed to have involved alcohol or drugs.
 - The oldest victim was age 79 and the youngest was 22.

From 2015 to 2020, trends in Washington state fatality accident data show:

- On average, 63% of victims were not wearing a life jacket.
- 85% occurred on vessels less than 19 feet.
- 44% occurred on human-powered vessels.

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The leading causes of fatal accidents was due to operator inattention, operator inexperience, and impairment (alcohol/drugs). The leading type of fatal accident was falling overboard, followed by capsizing and person ejected from a vessel.

TIPS FOR BOATERS

Get educated

Many recreational boaters in Washington must take an approved boating safety education course and carry a Washington State Boater Education Card. All boaters and paddlers are responsible for knowing the laws and keeping themselves and others safe. The Boating Program recommends boating safety courses even for those boaters who don't have to carry the card. The courses offer training in safety, emergency procedures and navigational rules. More information about boater education: www.boatered.org.

Conduct a (virtual) vessel safety check

Local marine law enforcement, the [U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary](#) and [United States Power Squadrons](#) (aka America's Boating Club) typically have certified vessel examiners who perform free vessel safety checks. During this time of social distancing, an [online virtual vessel safety check](#) option is also available.

Always wear a life jacket

State law requires all vessels, including canoes, kayaks and stand-up paddleboards to have at least one properly fitted Coast Guard-approved life jacket for each person onboard. All children, age 12 and younger must always wear one. The Boating Program encourages all boaters to wear their life jackets every time they go out on the water. Life jackets have evolved to be sophisticated, comfortable and tailored for specific [water activities](#). More about life jackets: www.wearitwashington.org.

Avoid alcohol and drugs

Boat owners and/or operators are responsible for the safety and well-being of everyone on board. Operating a boat while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, including marijuana, is not only unsafe — it's illegal. The Boating Program recommends designating a sober skipper. Washington state's [Boating Under the Influence](#) (BUI) law applies to all boats including kayaks, canoes, rowboats and inflatable fishing rafts. More about boating sober: www.boatsober.org.

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Bring communication devices

Boaters should carry two forms of communication that will work when wet, such as a whistle, waterproof cell phone or VHF marine radio. These devices increase the chance of being found in an emergency. Recommended equipment includes flares, a signal mirror and an air horn to aid emergency responders in search efforts. Boaters should also consider carrying a personal locator beacon (PLB), which instantly notifies responders of their location when activated. More information: [communications devices](#).

Check and understand the weather

Boaters should check the weather frequently before and during their boating excursion, keeping an eye on current conditions and forecasts. Boaters should check warnings, weather conditions, wind and wave forecasts, tides, and current conditions. It's also important to understand how each of these elements affects a person's ability to control their vessel. Boaters should heed warnings about specific navigational hazards and avoid navigating in those areas. [National Weather Service \(NOAA Weather Radio\) broadcasts](#) can be found on marine band and standalone weather radios.

Protect against cold-water shock

A fall into water under 70 degrees can be dangerous, and many of Washington's waters remain below 60 degrees year-round — including lakes and rivers — even during hot weather. The biggest risk is not hypothermia, its cold-water shock, which occurs in the first stage of immersion. Boaters need to take caution and prepare themselves by always wearing a life jacket, especially when operating boats under 21 feet. That includes small fishing boats or non-motorized craft such as kayaks or rowboats, which all have a higher risk of capsizing.

Mark it

The U.S Coast Guard and Washington partners urges paddlers to label their paddlecraft with the owner's name and phone number. This information can help guide search and rescue, prevent a false alarm or aid in the return of their paddlecraft. Paddlers can request a free "If Found" sticker to label their paddlecraft by contacting the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary at iffoundsticker@13cgaux.net. [Learn more](#).



Get connected

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The U.S. Coast Guard and Washington partners encourages boaters to use their engine cut-off switch every time they go boating. An engine cut-off device stops the boat's engine should the operator unexpectedly fall overboard. Some devices are even designed to stop the engine should passengers fall overboard. Starting April 1, 2021, as part of the National Defense Authorization Act, individuals operating vessels required to have an engine cut-off device must use them on federal waterways (Lake Washington, Roosevelt Lake, Columbia River, Puget Sound, etc.). Learn more about the new engine cut-off switch [federal law](#), or learn more about the ['Get Connected' campaign](#).

HELPFUL RESOURCES & LINKS

[2022 NOAA Weather Outlook](#) (PDF) – seasonal weather outlook May to Oct. 2022.

[2022 Washington Boating Public Safety Campaigns](#) (PDF) – outlines and describes the boating and paddling public safety campaigns planned for 2022.

[Washington State Parks Boating Program](#) (PDF) – fact sheet outlining the roles and responsibilities of the state's Boating Program.

[Boating Safety Dashboards](#) (website) – visual data of recreational boating accidents, fatalities and more broken-down state-by-state.

[USCG Boating Safety Resource Center](#) (website) – searchable Coast Guard accident and fatality data by state, year and one variable to obtain tables and/or graphs.

[A Boater's Guide to Federal Requirements for Recreational Boats](#) (PDF) – Coast Guard's guide to federal recreational boating laws and safety tips.

[Life jacket labels](#) (website) – Coast Guard's website detailing how to read life jacket labels and how to choose, wear, and care for life jackets.

[Washington Adventures in Boating Handbook](#) (PDF) – Washington State Parks Boating Program's guide to state recreational boating laws and safety tips.

[A Beginner's Guide to Safer Paddling](#) (PDF) – Coast Guard's helpful tips for new paddlers.

[Washington Mandatory Boater Education](#) (PDF) brochure – detailed information about the Boater Education Card and who is required by law to carry the card.

[Be Whale Wise](#) (Website) – provides information on laws protecting marine mammals and guidelines to promote safety and stewardship among recreational boaters.

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[Weather or Not to Boat or Paddle](#) (PDF) – details why weather is important to know and understand, outlines the information boaters and paddlers need to look for when planning their trip.

Learn more about boater safety education at www.BoaterEd.org.

Learn more about life jackets at www.WearItWashington.org.

Learn more about boating sober at www.BoatSober.org.

Learn more about paddlesports safety at www.PaddleSafeWa.org.

Learn more about the life jacket loaner program, including where to find the nearest one, at www.LifeJacketLoaner.org.

BOATING SAFETY EXPERTS

Rob Sendak | Washington State Parks Boating Program



Rob Sendak serves as the Boating Program manager for the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, and state Boating Law Administrator.

Sendak completed his bachelor's degree with a focus in communications and mass media at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana. He also earned a master's degree in public administration at the University of Washington's Evans School of Public Policy and Governance. He enjoys kayaking and

spending time with his family. His favorite state park is Patos Island Marine State Park in the San Juan Islands. He can be contacted at rob.sendak@parks.wa.gov.

Derek VanDyke | Washington State Parks Boating Program



Derek VanDyke serves as the education coordinator for the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission Boating Program. He develops strategies, key partnerships, and programs to influence target boating audiences to adopt basic safety behaviors. Prior to this role, Derek was K-12 and college educator, as well as a small business owner with a background in marketing and sales.

He is an avid boater that loves to kayak, sail, cruise the islands and fish both coastal and inland waters. His current position combines both his passion and skills with his desire to help others. He can be contacted at derek.vandyke@parks.wa.gov.

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LT Lucy Wright | U.S. Coast Guard 13th District Sector Puget Sound



LT Lucy Wright is stationed with the United States Coast Guard (USCG) at Puget Sound in the Enforcement Division. Wright graduated from the USCG Academy in 2016 where she majored in Marine and Environmental Science. Upon graduation, LT Wright served as a Deck Watch Officer onboard USCGC Spencer. Afterwards, she served as the Assistant Logistics Department Head for Sector Boston where she also worked as a Patrol Commander, Pollution Responder and Command Duty Officer in the Sector Command Center. Hailing from Havre de Grace, Maryland, LT Wright is an avid outdoors enthusiast and spends her weekends hiking in the mountains. She can be contacted at Lucy.M.Wright@uscg.mil.

SGT Richard Barton | King County Sheriff's Marine Rescue Dive Unit



Sergeant Richard Barton has served as a law enforcement officer for the last 30 years. He has been with the King County Sheriff's Office for 22 years and supervises the Marine Rescue Dive Unit. He holds a multitude of certifications in boat operations, dive rescue, incident command and serves as an instructor for marine law enforcement statewide. He can be contacted at richard.barton@kingcounty.gov.

Ashley Kover | Washington State Parks Boating Program



Ashley Kover serves as a communications consultant and public information officer for the Washington State Parks Boating Program. She produces safety materials and develops strategies to influence targeted boating audiences to adopt basic safety behaviors. Ashley studied communications and marketing at Western Washington University. She can be contacted at ashley.kover@parks.wa.gov.

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Ted Buehner | Consulting Meteorologist



Ted Buehner retired, after 40 years of service (1977 to 2018), from the National Weather Service (NWS). His last position was in Seattle as the NWS Warning Coordination Meteorologist. He continues his efforts to protect communities even in retirement by serving on various local committees such as the Washington State Emergency Communication Committee and Partners in Emergency Preparedness Conference. He is also a licensed amateur radio operator and holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Atmospheric Sciences from Oregon State University. He can be contacted at tornadoted@comcast.net.

ADDITIONAL CONTACTS

Washington State Parks

- Amanda McCarthy, Interim Communications Director, (360) 902-8562 or amanda.mccarthy@parks.wa.gov
- Meryl Lassen, Communications Consultant, (360) 902-8557 or meryl.lassen@parks.wa.gov

Washington State Department of Health

- For questions related to COVID19, contact the Washington Joint Information Center via email at wajic@mil.wa.gov.