

Ship Report Transcript

Wednesday, May 29, 2024

By Joanne Rideout

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It's time for the ship. Reports show about all things maritime. I'm Joanne Rideout. It's Wednesday, May 29th, 2024.

Well, let's take a quick look at our marine weather forecast and then we'll talk a little bit about boater safety statistics from the Coast Guard.

But first, we have high pressure slowly building across the northeastern Pacific through Thursday, and this will lead to gusty northerly winds and choppier seas by about Thursday afternoon and evening. We can expect similar conditions on Friday before an unusually late season storm system will bring stronger southerly winds to our waters late in the weekend or early next week. And if you look at Pacific Ocean weather radar - and there are great apps for that. One that I really like is called Storm Radar. You can see a pretty big honkin storm system out there. Pretty big. It sort of stretches down from the Aleutians into the Pacific, about opposite Seattle or so, and it's sort of slowly moving our way. So we never know exactly what's going to happen, of course, till the weather gets here, but we can plan on some stormy weather coming our way in about five days.

And today's marine weather forecast includes west winds 5 to 10 knots, rising to 10 to 15 in the afternoon. Seas 4 to 6 feet. Little bit about waves out there. Waves from the west three feet high at 4 seconds apart. And also from the west, five feet at 10 seconds apart. And a chance of showers in those two different sets of waves are caused by different causes. One of them is caused by our local wind waves and the other by swells coming in from further out to sea.

Well, just in time for boating season to begin. The U.S. Coast Guard yesterday released last year's statistics on recreational boating accidents. The good news is the fatalities and overall incidents are down. But the numbers are still significant. Fatalities fell by about 11%. That's 72 fewer deaths than the year before, but still 564 people died in boating accidents last year. Overall incidents decreased by almost 5% and non-fatal injuries also declined by 4%. So that's good news. But alcohol continued to be the leading known contributing factor in fatal boating accidents last year, accounting for 79 deaths. And that's 17% of total boating fatalities. The data also shows that in 2023, the fatality rate was five deaths per 100,000 registered recreational vessels, and that's a 9% decrease from last year's rate.

And in 1971, when the Safe Boating Act was first passed, the rate was more than 20 deaths per 100,000 registered recreational vessels. So things have improved a lot since then. Property damage, damaged boats mostly, I would imagine, totaled \$63 million.

And here are the top causes of accidents on boats. Operator Inattention. Meaning whoever's at the wheel or the tiller is not paying attention. Improper lookout. It's good practice to have a second person on your boat as a lookout, over and above the person steering. This is really great here on the Columbia River, because there are sometimes a lot of things floating in the water, old logs and other debris. And if you have somebody looking out ahead of your boat, you can steer around those things instead of hitting them. Other factors are operator inexperience, excessive speed and machinery failure.

Here's a quote from Captain Amy Beach, U.S. Coast Guard inspections and compliance director. "Boaters should remain vigilant on the water as most incidents occur when you might least expect them. That means in good visibility, calm waters and little wind."

So that goes against what you might think. That bad weather is a culprit. And it can be sometimes, but it's usually human error that's the problem. The most frequent events with boats involve collisions with other vessels, objects or groundings hitting bottom, which is why it is so important to keep a proper lookout, to navigate at a safe speed, to adhere to navigation rules and obey navigational aids.

And if you don't know what all that means, you should take the state's free boating safety course, which is something you need to do in Oregon if you're a boater, get a boating safety card. I have one. It's an easy class and you'll learn a lot.

Recreational boating deaths in 2023 occurred predominantly on vessels operated by individuals who had not received boating safety instruction, accounting for 75% of fatalities. So education really makes a difference in this case, and it's so easy to get open motorboats, personal watercraft and cabin motorboats where the vessel types most involved in reported incidents.

Drowning accounted for 75% of deaths, with 87% of those victims not wearing life jackets. The Coast Guard reminds us to wear serviceable, properly sized and correctly fastened life jackets.

I say this over and over again, but I'll say it again. Wearing a PFD, a personal flotation device, a lifejacket, is the number one thing you can do to save yourself if something happens and you end up in the water - and it's something that you need to do before something bad happens.

The Coast Guard says over half of fatal accidents involved events where people ended up in the water, a fall overboard, a vessel capsizing, things like that. One side note that I've mentioned before with regard to accidents on the water in general. Things can go from okay to deadly really fast.

Somebody falls overboard, for instance, that can be life threatening here, because of our strong currents and cold water. And if you have never tried to pull a person back into a boat, rest assured that it's harder than it looks. Most people become incapacitated to some degree when they fall in, and so they can't be much help. An adult person is very, very heavy, much heavier than you'd expect.

In 2023, there was a slightly higher percentage of deaths attributed to canoes and kayaks compared to other vessel types. When I took kayaking lessons, one thing the instructor said to me was, dress for the water temperature, not the air temperature. And, kayaking is a water sport. Expect to get wet and dress accordingly. The Coast Guard encourages boaters to check the weather and the water conditions prior to getting underway.

In addition to wearing a lifejacket and taking a boating safety course, the Coast Guard recommends all boaters and small vessels attach the engine cutoff switch. Get a free vessel safety check and both sober and engine cutoff, which, by the way, attaches to you and the engine. So if you fall in, it automatically shuts the engine off.

I'm mentioning all of this not to scare you. But to make you aware that our waterways are not the same as a water park, where there are controlled conditions created by humans, for your pleasure. Mother Nature controls what happens out there on the real water. It's the real deal, and you need to take it

seriously and protect yourself and your loved ones. One of the best times to handle an emergency is before it happens.

By that I mean a little preparation beforehand can turn a potentially deadly incident into a great story that you can tell later, all about how you survived.

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