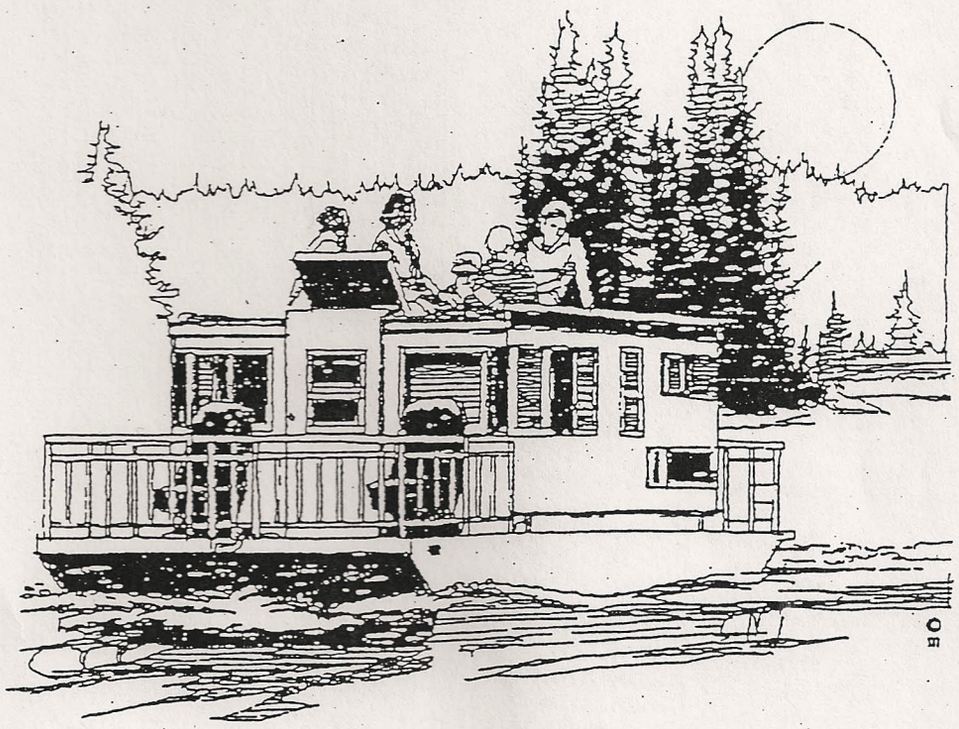
ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

BOATING ACCIDENT REPORT

January 1, 1995 - December 31, 1995



Illinois
Department of
Natural Resources

Recreational boating continues to enjoy great popularity as a means of summertime recreation in Illinois. The whole character of recreational boating is changing, however, as smaller, faster, less expensive watercraft represent a rapidly growing share of the market. Many of these boats are either personal watercraft (PWC) or small craft based on a PWC power unit that can hold up to five passengers. They are very fast and extremely maneuverable and tend to appeal to younger boaters who enjoy performing dare-devil stunts on them. This is not criticism. The newer class of boats has brought about a whole new way to have fun on the water and most anyone who has had an opportunity to try some of them would agree that they are indeed fun.

Along with the fun, however, have come most problems not the least of which is the disproportionally high rate of accidents involving PWC. The overall fatality rate resulting from accidents involving all types of boats was down in 1995, a trend that has been experienced for several years. Sixteen people died in fifteen fatal boating accidents in 1995 as compared to seventeen in 1994 and thirty-two in 1993. These numbers are very encouraging. Of continued concern, though, is the steady rise on the number of reportable accidents. This brings us again back to the issues surrounding PWC. There were 13,000 PWC registered in Illinois in 1995. These boats represent just over 3.5% of all registered watercraft in the state and yet they accounted for about 44% of all reported accidents. This would appear to account for the rise in the number of reported accidents considering that ten short years ago PWC were relatively rare on Illinois waters. The most common causes of accidents involving PWC appear to be failure to observe rules of the road and operator inattention. Operators are focused on what is right in front of them and yet these craft can change direction quickly at high speed and the operators don't seem to look before they do so. Educational programs directed specifically at PWC owners and operators are being developed by the National Association of Boating Law Administrators in cooperation with the industry and Illinois will be considering the encorporation of these into state boating safety programs.

In previous years, an examination of the fatal accidents for the year revealed that the majority of the victims would likely be alive today had they been wearing a personal floatation device (PFD). We can draw the same conclusion this year. Of the sixteen people who died in boating accidents in 1995 it appears that ten of them would have survived had they been wearing PFDs. Alcohol and drugs also appear to have played a significant role in the fatalities for the year. Fully half of all the fatalities that occurred during the reporting period appear to involve alcohol and/or drug abuse as a significant contributing factor.

Overall, it appears that alcohol and drug abuse and failure to wear PFDs continue to rank as the leading causes of boating fatalities. An intoxicated boater who wears a PFD, however, greatly improves his or her chance of surviving an accident. Education and enforcement efforts should target these two factors as a high priority when planning for the coming season.

Tom Wakolbinger, Deputy Chief
Office of Law Enforcement

State of Illinois
Boating Accident Report

From January 1, 1995 to December 31, 1995

Total Accidents	178	PROPERTY DAMAGE*	
Injuries	88		
Alcohol Confirmed	19	Total $ Amount	$136,158.00
# of Drownings	13	Average $ Amount	$ 993.85
# of Deaths from Injuries	03		
Total Fatalities	16		

Month

January	00	April	05	July	68	October	03
February	00	May	20	August	31	November	02
March	03	June	30	September	16	December	00
						Total	178

Day

Monday	15	Wednesday	09	Friday	15	Sunday	64
Tuesday	13	Thursday	12	Saturday	50	Total	178

County

Adams	05	Jackson	04	Moultrie	01
Bureau	01	Jefferson	01	Ogle	03
Calhoun	03	Jersey	06	Peoria	09
Carroll	05	JoDaviess	01	Putnam	01
Cass	02	Kane	04	Randolph	03
Christian	01	Kankakee	02	Rock Island	09
Clinton	04	Lake	24	Sangamon	02
Cook	23	LaSalle	07	Schuyler	01
DeWitt	05	Lee	01	Shelby	03
Fayette	01	Livingston	02	Tazewell	02
Franklin	02	Macon	02	Union	01
Grundy	06	Macoupin	01	Whiteside	01
Hancock	01	Madison	01	Will	03
Hardin	01	Mason	04	Williamson	03
Henderson	01	McHenry	05	Winnebago	08
Henry	01	Montgomery	01	Total	178

*If the accident report indicated that property damage was "less than $500," it was entered as "$0." If the accident report indicated that the property damage was "$500 or greater" it was entered as "$500." If there was an actual dollar amount estimate, the actual amount was entered. Therefore, the "total $ amount" and the "average $ amount" are low and not an accurate representation of the property damage sustained.

Time

Midnight - 6:00 a.m.	08
6:01 - 12 Noon	14
12:01 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.	115
6:01 p.m.- 11:59 p.m.	41
Total	178

Formal Instruction

None	147
U.S. C. G. Aux.	20
U.S. Power Squad.	05
American Red Cross	02
State	06
Other	16
Unknown	32
Total	228

Water Conditions

Calm	80
Choppy	58
Rough	12
Very Rough	08
Strong Current	07
Unknown	13
Total	178

Weather Conditions

Clear	143
Cloudy	20
Fog	02
Rain	01
Hazy	01
Snow	00
Other	11
Total	178

Boat Information

Open Motorboat	77
Cabin Motorboat	59
Auxiliary Sail	01
Sail (only)	01
Rowboat	00
Canoe	04
Personal Watercraft	77
Other	01
Unknown	08
	220

Fire Extinguisher Used

Yes	07
No	193
Unknown	05
Total	205

Wind

None	22
Light	101
Moderate	33
Strong	08
Stormy	01
Unknown	13
Total	178

Visibility

Good	147
Fair	13
Poor	06
Unknown	12
Total	178

Weather Encountered

Was as Forecasted	145
Not as Forecasted	01
No Forecast Obtained	16
Unknown	16
Total	178

Operation at Time of Accident

Cruising	137
Approaching Dock	11
Water Skiing	05
Towing	01
Drifting	12
At Anchor	02
Tied to Dock	03
Fishing	08
Diving/Swimming	08
Hunting	01
Racing	00
Being Towed	01
Fueling	01
Other	27
Total	217

Operator's Opinion/Cause of Accident

Alcohol	15	Fault of Other Person	27
Weather Conditions	06	Drug Use	02
Excessive Speed	37	Fault of Machinery	10
No Proper Lookout	20	Fault of Equipment	05
Overloading	02	Fault of Hull	03
Improper Loading	03	Other	126
Hazardous Waters	27	Unknown	20
		Total	303

Type of Accident

Grounding	08	Collision with Float Obj.	16
Capsizing	09	Falls Overboard	18
Flooding	04	Falls in Boat	01
Sinking	12	Burns	00
Fire or Explosion (fuel)	02	Hit by Boat/Propeller	09
Fire or Expl. (Other)	02	Other	20
Collision with Vessel	56	Unknown	05
Collision with Fixed Obj.	16	Total	178

Body of Water

Bluff Lake	02	Lake Carroll	02
Bonita Vista Lake	01	Lake Catherine	02
Calumet River	03	Lake Decatur	02
Calumet Sag Channel	01	Lake Holiday	01
Carlyle Lake	03	Lake Kincaid	04
Chicago Ship/San Canal	01	Lake Lou Yeager	01
Chicago River	03	Lake Marie	01
Clinton Lake	05	Lake Michigan	22
Coal City Area Club Lk.	01	Lake Shelbyville	04
Crab Orchard Lake	03	Lake Springfield	02
Des Plaines River	01	Lake Taylorville	01
Fox Lake	03	LaMoine River	01
Fox River	08	Mississippi River	27
Frogtown Lake	01	Nippersink Lake	01
Gages Lake	01	Ohio River	01
Gillespie Lake	01	Petite Lake	01
Grass Lake	02	Piasa Harbor	01
Green River	01	Pistakee Lake	03
Harold Lake	01	Rend Lake	02
Hater Canal	01	Rock River	14
Heidecke Lake	01	Sesser Lake	01
Illinois River	29	Small Town Lake	02
Iroquois River	01	Vandalia Lake	01
Kankakee River	02	Vermilion River	02
Kaskaskia River	02	Wonder Lake	01
		Total	178

~~Education~~ Operator Experience

Age	Less Than 20 Hours	20 to 100 Hours	100 to 500 Hours	Over 500 Hours	Unknown	Total
< - 10	00	00	00	00	00	00
10-12	02	01	00	00	00	03
13-17	06	04	01	00	01	12
18-19	04	02	02	00	01	09
20-29	23	23	17	02	03	68
30-39	14	20	21	05	05	65
40-49	04	05	17	04	02	32
50-59	03	03	12	04	00	22
60-69	02	00	02	01	00	05
70-Over	00	00	00	00	01	01
Unknown	03	01	02	02	03	11
Total	61	59	74	18	16	228

- Education -

Age	With Formal Instruction	Without Formal Instruction	Unknown	Total
< - 10	00	00	00	00
10 - 12	00	03	00	03
13 - 17	02	09	01	12
18 - 19	02	06	01	09
20 - 29	14	46	08	68
30 - 39	11	44	10	65
40 - 49	09	20	03	32
50 - 59	08	11	03	22
60 - 69	00	00	01	01
70 - Over	00	01	00	01
Unknown	03	07	05	15
	49	147	32	228

NARRATIVES FOR 1995 FATAL BOATING ACCIDENTS

There were 176 recreational boating accidents in 1995. Of those, 15 involved fatalities, killing 16 boaters. One of the 15 accidents involved a double fatality. A critical examination of these fatal boating accidents helps us to determine the focus of our future enforcement emphasis. Additionally, it provides our safety education professionals with insights on how to better prepare the boating public to be safe on Illinois waterways. Provided below is a brief description of the 15 accidents where 16 boaters lost their lives.

1. Three men were fishing from a small boat on Gillespie Lake in Macoupin County. They were near the dam when they were hit by a severe thunderstorm with heavy rain. The boat filled with water and capsized. One passenger drowned. Although the operator indicated that all three fishermen had been drinking alcoholic beverages prior to the accident, there was no evidence presented in the investigation to indicate that alcohol was indeed a factor in the passengers death. Although PFDs were available in the boat, they were not used.

   Contributing factors:
   - -Severe weather forecasted and encountered
   - -Failure to wear PFDs

2. The operator of a personal watercraft was killed when he lost control of his personal watercraft above the dam on the Fox River in Kane County. He was caught in the "boil" and drowned, in spite of wearing a PFD and wet suit. He had just purchased his personal watercraft two days before. According to newspaper reports, the operator was an avid skier and familiar with this section of the river. However, the warning buoys for the dam were not in place at the time of the accident.

   Contributing factors:
   - -Warning buoys not in place
   - -Inexperience with personal watercraft operation

3. Three men were occupying a small flat-bottomed jon boat that was rated for only two occupants. They were traveling up the Rock River in Ogle County, with one passenger sitting on the bow and the second passenger sitting in the middle towards the left side. The wake from another boat went over the bow and the boat filled with water. The operator put on the only wearable PFD in the boat. The boat capsized to the left and the middle occupant fell out. He was seen hanging on to a type IV PFD but soon disappeared under the water. The operator and surviving passenger were rescued The operator was arrested for OUI. His BAC was .24. The coroner's inquest revealed that the victim's BAC was .05.

   Contributing factors:
   - -Over loading
   - -Insufficient PFDs available
   - -Operator under the influence
   - -Victim's BAC of .05 may have impaired his ability to swim or stay with the boat

4. Three men were boating on the Mississippi River in Rock Island County. One passenger was riding on the bow of the boat as the operator attempted to jump the wake of another vessel. The bow-riding passenger fell overboard and drowned. PFDs were available but not readily accessible in the boat. All three subjects had been drinking beer for at least four hours prior to the accident. Although the operator was not arrested immediately for OUI, the State's Attorney filed charges later. The toxicology report on the victim revealed a BAC of .132.

Contributing factors:

-PFDs not accessible or worn
-Reckless operation and wake jumping
-Both operator and victim under the influence of alcohol

5. A 14' Glastron boat occupied by 7 people capsized on Lake Michigan. A 16-year old girl, celebrating her birthday, drowned. According to the operator, the motor stalled. He attempted to restart it with the motor in reverse. The boat went backwards and water came over the transom capsizing it. The operator was arrested for OUI. It is unknown whether any PFDs were available for use. None were used.

Contributing factors:

-Over loading
-Operator under the influence of alcohol and arrested for OUI
-No PFDs available or used

6. Two men were fishing on the Green River at the mouth of the Rock River in Henry County. They had two anchors out, one on the starboard bow cleat and one on the port. They were anchored in a very strong current and the wind was gusting at 20 mph. The operator started the engine and left it in idle. The port anchor was raised by the operator. The passenger was trying to raise the starboard anchor when the boat rolled to starboard and capsized. The operator climbed on top of the boat and the passenger attempted to swim to shore but didn't make it. There were PFDs available in the boat but now worn. An investigation revealed that the anchor line must have been caught on a submerged object. The harder the passenger pulled on the line, the more the boat rolled to starboard until it capsized.

Contributing factors:

-Hazardous waters
-Failure to wear PFD

7. Three young men borrowed a paddle boat and took it out on a small neighborhood lake in Will County. The boat started to take on water and sink so all three jumped off. Two of the men attempted to swim for shore when they noticed that their companion was struggling in the water. They both swam back to assist him. Due to his frantic struggling, they were unable to help him and he drowned. The survivors indicated that all three had been drinking prior to the mishap. The coroner's reported that the victim's BAC was .073. There were no PFDs available on the paddle boat.

Contributing factors:

-Ignorance/inexperience
-Failure to have PFDs available or worn
-Possible impairment due to blood alcohol level near the Presumptive level of .10

8. A sailboat was found grounded along the Mississippi River in Union County. Discovered in the boat were many personal items. A handwritten sign was found attached to the port side of the cabin indicating that the boat was out of fuel and the operator had gone to look for some. However, there were no footprints found along the shoreline and the dinghy was still in its place. This led investigators to believe the operator fell overboard at some point in time. Eight days after the discovery of the boat, the decomposing body of the operator was found by fishermen. The body was too decomposed for an accurate reading of alcohol ingestion prior to death. However, a toxic level of cocaine was found in the blood. The operator was not wearing a PFD when found.

Contributing factors:

-Under the influence of cocaine
-Failure to wear PFD
-Other factors unknown

Cook Co

9. A sailboat with a broken mast was found overturned on Lake Michigan. The next day, the body of the operator was recovered. The sailboat was inspected and it was determined that the mast broke which caused the craft to take on water and capsize. The 3 h.p. motor was not used for unknown reasons. The operator was wearing a PFD when found.

Contributing factors:

-Fault of machinery/equipment
-Other factors unknown

10. A personal watercraft and power boat collided head on on the Fox River in McHenry County. The personal watercraft operator died instantly of massive head injuries. The operator of the power boat stated that he knew he was on a head on collision course with the personal watercraft. He veered to the right and the personal watercraft mirrored his actions by veering to the right also. Each time he attempted an evasive maneuver, the personal watercraf veered in the same direction. Although the victim was wearing a PFD, he died from injuries sustained and not from drowning. A less than presumptive level of alcohol was found in the victim's system (.0456); however, metabolites of cannabis were also found.

Contributing factors:

-Navigational rule violation
-Possible impairment due to the victim being under the combined influence of alcohol and marijuana

11. An elderly man was spotted fishing from a boat on the Illinois River in Mason County around 4:00 p.m. An hour and 40 minutes later, the same boat was seen unoccupied, traveling in circles. It is unknown what caused the operator to fall overboard. He was not wearing a PFD when his body was recovered the next day. An autopsy revealed that the victim had a BAC of .163 and was suffering from severe heart and liver disease.

Contributing factors:

-Boating/fishing alone
-Not wearing a PFD
-Under the influence of alcohol with a BAC of .163

12. Three occupants were injured and two died as a result of a boat accident on the Ohio River in Harden County. The boat was being operated at a high rate of speed downriver, parallel to the Illinois River bank. The boat had just been purchased the day before. The boat hit some rocks along the bank and went airborne. It came to rest upside down, partially in the water. Both victims were pinned under water by the overturned boat. The three injured occupants were thrown from the boat on to the rocky shoreline. One of the injured occupants walked and crawled all night until he came to a residence where he could report the accident. The coroner's inquest revealed that both victims died from multiple blunt trauma. Both victims had BACs of .26.

Contributing factors:
-Excessive speed
-Inexperience
-Both operator and passenger under the influence of alcohol with BACs of .26

13. Scant information available at this time. Two boats were involved in an accident on Gages Lake in Lake County. A four-year old girl was killed.

Contributing factors:
-Unknown

14. A husband and wife were fishing in a 12' jon boat on Club Lake in Grundy County. The wife left to move the boat trailer to another ramp. Sometime after her departure, the boat capsized and here husband drowned. It is unknown why the boat capsized. Although in an interview, the survivor stated that the boat was not one of her favorites because it was "too tippy." PFDs were available in the boat but were not worn. The coroner's inquest revealed that the operator drowned.

Contributing factors:
-PFDs available not worn
-Other factors unknown

15. Three duck hunters and a dog were in a 14' jon boat en route to their vehicle. A group of ducks flew overhead and one of the hunters attempted to call the ducks in. The survivors were unclear as to just what happened next. The boat began taking on water and it capsized. They all attempted to swim to shore but only two of the hunters and the dog made it. There were no PFDs in the boat. Peoria County - Harold Lake

Contributing factors:
-No PFDs available or worn
-Other factors unknown