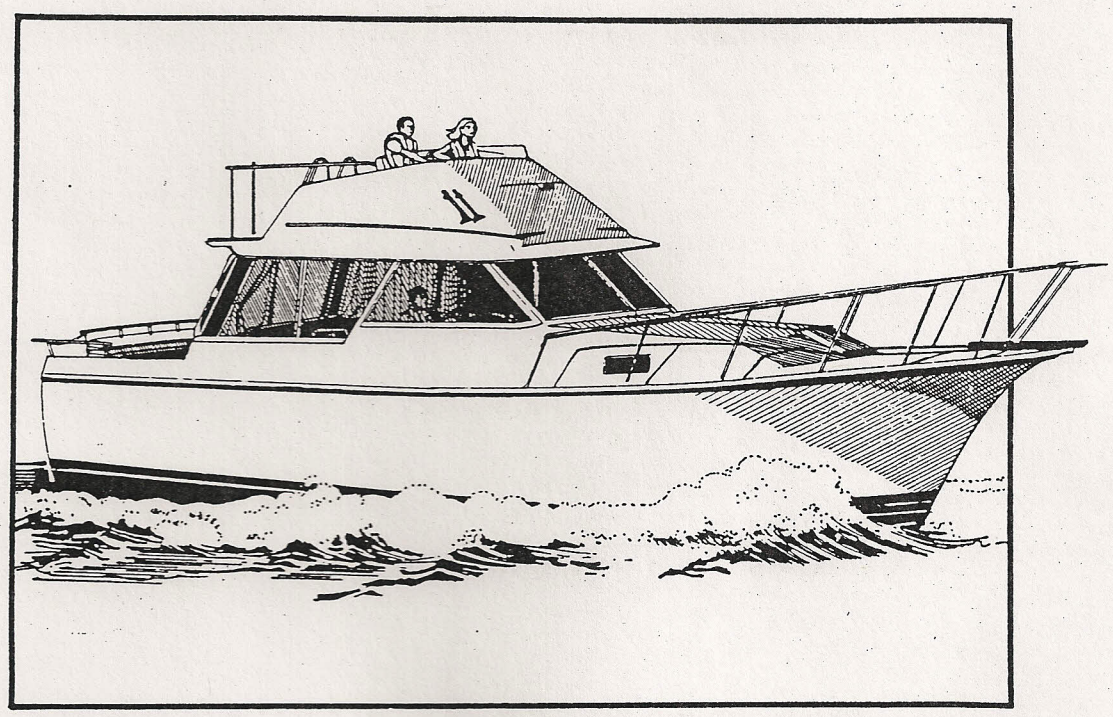
ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

BOATING ACCIDENT REPORT

January 1, 1991 - December 31, 1991



Illinois Department of Conservation
life and land together

In spite of reports of drastic decreases in the numbers of new boats sold nationwide, the number of registered boats in Illinois grew by over 10,000 in 1991. The increase in the numbers of boaters on the waters in the state is reflected in the accident statistics for the 1991 boating season with increases in all categories. The number of reported boat accidents increased from 146 in 1990 to 179 in 1991. Unfortunately, the number of deaths resulting from these accidents also went up - from 26 to 31.

The irresponsible consumption of alcohol continues to be a significant factor in many boat accidents. Thirty-one people died as a result of 27 accidents, more than a third of which were directly attributed to alcohol consumption by the operator or victim. It is difficult to determine the degree to which alcohol played a role in the remaining 148 accidents. Statistics on non-fatal accidents are compiled largely from reports that are completed by the boat operators themselves, as required by Illinois law. Experience has shown us that people are not likely to implicate themselves when stating the cause of the accident and are even less likely to list alcohol consumption as a contributing factor. This is evident, according to reports submitted by boat operators who were involved in an accident, as the single greatest cause of accidents being reported as "fault of the other person".

The Office of Law Enforcement is making greater efforts to investigate boat accidents in an effort to more accurately determine the causes. Many officers have received accident investigation training and are already providing better information regarding the causes of accidents. All officers are trained in the enforcement of Operation Under the Influence (OUI) laws and the number of arrests has increased each year since the law became effective in 1986. These numbers, however, were expected to increase as officers became more proficient in the detection and arrest of impaired boaters and do not necessarily indicate a growing problem.

The accidents documented in this report point out the need for continued efforts in boat safety education. Boating safety education, continued aggressive enforcement of boating laws and investigation of boat accidents by our conservation force will hopefully encourage individuals to be safe and responsible boaters. Perhaps through the combined efforts of our Division's dedicated Volunteer Services Coordinators, volunteer boating safety education instructors and Conservation Police Officers, we will make boating on Illinois waters safer for the 1992 boating season.

Deputy Chief Tom Wakolbinger
Illinois Department of Conservation
Office of Law Enforcement

STATE OF ILLINOIS

BOATING ACCIDENT REPORT

From January 1991 to December 1991

Total Accidents	- 179	PROPERTY DAMAGE (total of	
Injuries	- 125	all vessels involved)	
# of Drownings	- 23	Total $ Amount	$587,550
# of Deaths from injuries	- 08	Average $ Amount	4,227

Number of Registered Boats - Approximately 362,000

TIME & PLACE

MONTH

January	- 00	April	- 11	July	- 43	October	- 04
February	- 00	May	- 21	August	- 26	November	- 04
March	- 03	June	- 40	September	- 25	December	- 02
						TOTAL	-179

DAY

Monday	- 13	Wednesday	- 15	Friday	- 19	Sunday	- 57
Tuesday	- 16	Thursday	- 11	Saturday	- 48	TOTAL	-179

COUNTY

Adams	- 01	Jersey	- 02	Morgan	- 01
Alexander	- 01	JoDavies	- 04	Moultrie	- 01
Bond	- 01	Johnson	- 01	Peoria	- 05
Boone	- 01	Kane	- 02	Pike	- 01
Calhoun	- 02	Kankakee	- 01	Putnam	- 02
Carroll	- 01	Lake	- 25	Randolph	- 01
Clinton	- 05	LaSalle	- 05	Richland	- 04
Cook	- 38	Lawrence	- 01	Rock Island	- 08
DeWitt	- 07	Lee	- 01	Sangamon	- 03
Dupage	- 02	Livingston	- 02	Shelby	- 03
Fayette	- 01	Macon	- 02	St. Clair	- 03
Franklin	- 04	Macoupin	- 01	Tazewell	- 03
Fulton	- 01	Madison	- 06	Vermilion	- 01
Greene	- 01	Marshall	- 01	Will	- 01
Grundy	- 08	Mason	- 02	Williamson	- 01
Jackson	- 01	McHenry	- 04	Winnebago	- 01
Jefferson	- 02	Montgomery	- 02	Woodford	- 01
				TOTAL	-179

TIME

Midnight - 6:00 am	- 18
6:01 - 12 Noon	- 16
12:01 - 6:00 pm	- 96
6:01 - Midnight	- 47
TOTAL	-179

FORMAL INSTRUCTION

None	-111
U.S. Coast Guard Aux	- 24
U.S. Power Squadron	- 12
American Red Cross	- 02
State	- 13
Other	- 32
Unknown	- 30
TOTAL	-224

WATER CONDITION

Calm	- 90
Choppy	- 57
Rough	- 11
Very Rough	- 07
Strong Current	- 05
Unknown	- 09
TOTAL	-179

WEATHER CONDITION

Clear	- 136
Cloudy	- 29
Fog	- 01
Rain	- 01
Hazy	- 04
Snow	- 01
Other	- 07
TOTAL	- 179

BOAT INFORMATION

Open Motorboat	- 121
Cabin Motorboat	- 31
Auxiliary Sail	- 12
Sail (only)	- 06
Rowboat	- 05
Canoe	- 06
Jet ski	- 09
Other	- 28
Unknown	- 06
TOTAL	- 224

FIRE EXTINGUISHER USED

Yes	- 16
No	-165
Unknown	- 43
TOTAL	-224

WIND

None	- 27
Light	- 86
Moderate	- 37
Strong	- 19
Stormy	- 03
Unknown	- 07
TOTAL	-179

VISIBILITY

Good	- 145
Fair	- 15
Poor	- 12
Unknown	- 07
TOTAL	- 179

WEATHER ENCOUNTERED

Was as forecasted	-121
Not as forecasted	- 05
No forecast obtained	- 37
Unknown	- 16
TOTAL	-179

OPERATION AT TIME OF ACCIDENT

Cruising	- 106
Approaching Dock	- 12
Water Skiing	- 14
Towing	- 05
Drifting	- 23
At Anchor	- 07
Tied to Dock	- 05
Fishing	- 12
Diving/Swimming	- 00
Hunting	- 02
Racing	- 06
Being Towed	- 00
Fueling	- 00
Other	- 30
Unknown	- 02
TOTAL	- 224

OPERATOR'S OPINION/CAUSE OF ACCIDENT

Alcohol - Use	- 14
Weather Conditions	- 19
Excessive Speed	- 26
No Proper Lookout	- 41
Overloading	- 04
Improper Loading	- 04
Hazardous Waters	- 18
Fault of Other Person	- 75
Drug Use	- 01
Fault of Hull	- 05
Fault of Machinery	- 15
Fault of Equipment	- 08
Other	- 75
Unknown	- 09
TOTAL	-314

TYPE OF ACCIDENT

Grounding	- 11	Coll. with Float Obj.	- 20
Capsizing	- 21	Falls Overboard	- 08
Flooding	- 10	Falls in Boat	- 01
Sinking	- 11	Burns	- 00
Fire or Expl. (fuel)	- 08	Hit by Boat/Propeller	- 19
Fire or Expl. (other)	- 00	Other	- 20
Coll. with Vessel	- 33	Unknown	- 00
Coll. with Fixed Obj.	- 17	Total	-179

BODY OF WATER

Apple Canyon Lake	- 01	Lake Marie	- 01
Bluff Lake	- 02	Lake Michigan	- 34
Calumet Sag Channel	- 06	Lake of Egypt	- 01
Candlewick Lake	- 01	Lake Senachwine	- 02
Carlyle Lake	- 07	Lake Shelbyville	- 04
Channel Lake	- 01	Lake Springfield	- 03
Chgo Ship/San Canal	- 01	Lake Vermilion	- 01
Chicago River	- 05	LaSalle Lake	- 02
Clinton Lake	- 07	Mackinaw River	- 01
Crab Orchard Lake	- 01	Meredosia Lake	- 01
East Fork Lake	- 02	Mississippi River	- 18
Farm Pond	- 02	Nippersink Lake	- 01
Fox Lake	- 06	Ossami Lake	- 01
Fox River	- 08	Petite Lake	- 01
Grass Lake	- 02	Piasa Creek	- 01
Holiday Shores Lake	- 01	Powderhorn Lake	- 01
Illinois River	- 20	Powerton Lake	- 01
Kankakee River	- 03	Private Club Lake	- 03
Kaskaskia River	- 04	Ramsey Lake Sp.	- 01
Lake Decatur	- 02	Red Hills Lake	- 01
Lake Holiday	- 01	Rend Lake	- 06
Lake Kinkaid	- 01	Rock River	- 05
Lake Lou Yeager	- 02	Vermilion River	- 02
		Wolf Lake	- 01
		TOTAL	-179

AGE	Less than 20 hours	20 to 100 hours	100 to 500 hours	Over 500 hours	Unknown	Total
Teenage	07	06	04	00	00	17
20 - 29	07	19	18	11	07	62
30 - 39	09	08	18	23	04	62
40 - 49	07	03	18	19	02	50
50 - 59	02	00	06	12	04	24
60 - 69	01	00	00	03	01	05
70 -Over	00	00	00	01	00	01
Unknown	01	00	00	00	02	03
TOTAL	34	36	64	69	21	224

17 or Younger 7 With Instructions 7 Without Instructions 0

NARRATIVES FOR 1991 FATAL BOATING ACCIDENTS

1. NARRATIVE: A 4 year old boy and his 11 year old uncle were sitting in a canoe along the shore of a Fulton County pond waiting for their 16 year old uncle to return with a fishing pole. While waiting, the canoe began to drift from the shore. Both boys began to paddle with their hands in an attempt to return to shore. Unable to control the canoe, one boy grabbed for a partially submerged stick to stop the boat. The stick broke and the canoe capsized throwing both boys into the water. Once in the water the 11 year old grabbed his nephew's arm and began to swim towards shore. The older boy continued to the shore when he was unable to maintain contact with the 4 year old, who drowned. There were no PFD's or paddles in the canoe.

   Cause of Accident: Capsizing
   Contributing Factors: Lack of adult supervision, no PFD's and no paddles

2. NARRATIVE: Two teenage boys were fishing along the shore of a Tazewell County lake when the wind began to push the bow of the canoe. In an attempt to straighten the canoe, the 14 year old shifted his weight causing the canoe to tip throwing both occupants into the water. The younger boy was unable to swim and struggled with his companion who was trying to help him. Unable to control his drowning friend, the older boy broke free and swam to shore to get help. There were no PFD's on board the canoe. The two youths had taken the canoe without the owner's consent.

   Cause of Accident: Capsizing
   Contributing Factors: No PFD's

3. NARRATIVE: Five men were celebrating the homecoming of one of the men from the Gulf War at a Lake Michigan outing. They had been drinking beer when they decided to take two racing sailboats and three kayak paddles from a nearby residence. They paddled out into Lake Michigan and began "goofing around". Eventually the sailboats capsized and all five of them entered the water. Although the day was quite balmy, the water temperature of Lake Michigan was still only 40 degrees. Three of the men made it back to shore; two drowned.

   Cause of Accident: Capsizing
   Contributing Factors: Alcohol consumption, cold water conditions, no PFD's, irresponsible behavior

4. NARRATIVE: Two young men were fishing in a Greene County farm pond. The victim was standing in a boat when he put his foot up on the edge of the boat causing it to overturn. His companion attempted to rescue him, but the victim was a non-swimmer and the water temperature of 42 degrees hampered rescue efforts. There were no PFD's in the boat.

   Cause: Capsizing
   Contributing Factors: No PFD's, cold water conditions, victim a non-swimmer

5. NARRATIVE: About 1:30 a.m., following a bachelor party, three men decided to take a canoe ride in the Mackinaw River and began paddling upstream. As they started to turn the canoe around, the swift current caught the craft and it began to drift sideways with the port side facing downstream. The canoe lodged in a partially submerged tree whereupon one of the passengers reportedly stood up which caused the canoe to capsize throwing all three men into the water. The groom was carried downstream and drowned as the two survivors managed to hold on to some tree limbs and the canoe. The victim was a non-swimmer and had been drinking heavily. The coroner's autopsy report revealed a blood alcohol content of .226. There were no PFD's in the canoe.

   Cause of Accident: Capsizing
   Contributing Factors: Alcohol consumption, no PFD's

6. NARRATIVE: Five individuals at Ramsey Lake State Park, "borrowed" a rowboat from the concession area for a midnight boat ride. One person stood up in the boat which caused another passenger to fall out. A third passenger fell out trying to assist the person in the water. The boat capsized and two people drowned. The coroner's autopsy revealed that one of the victims had a blood alcohol content of .12, the other .18. There were no PFD's in the boat. Four of the five people had consumed alcohol prior to entering the boat.

   Cause of Accident: Capsizing
   Contributing Factors: Alcohol consumption, no PFD's

7. NARRATIVE: A Wisconsin man was operating a boat after 11:00 p.m. on Fox Lake when his boat collided with another boat and he died from injuries. The victim was reportedly operating his boat without running lights. The coroner's autopsy revealed that the victim had a blood alcohol content of .08 and was positive for cocaine.

   Cause of Accident: Collision with vessel
   Contributing Factors: Alcohol consumption, drug use

8. NARRATIVE: A passenger of a power boat was attempting to put up the canvas top on the boat while the boat was operating. The canvas top fell, obscuring the operator's view. The operator, unable to see, steered the boat into the rocks. After hitting the rocks, the boat went airborne approximately 40 feet and landed upside down. The passenger was pinned under the boat and drowned.

   Cause of Accident: No proper lookout, collision with fixed object
   Contributing Factors: Excessive speed

9. NARRATIVE: A fisherman fell from his boat and died. The boat was found in the middle of the river with the motor running in neutral. The victim's baseball cap and boat seat were found floating nearby. There were no witnesses.

   Cause of Accident: Falls overboard
   Contributing Factors: Unknown

10. NARRATIVE: A 23 year old man was killed when he hit a floating pier. The victim was being towed on an innertube when the boat pulled him too close to a pier. The boat was traveling at approximately 30 mph when the operator made a 180 degree turn throwing the victim from the tube and into the pier.

    Cause of Accident: No proper lookout, lack of good judgement
    Contributing Factors: None

11. NARRATIVE: One injury and one fatality resulted when a jet ski collided with the back of another jet ski. The victims were on the lead jet ski which was slowing down to enter a no-wake area. The second jet ski was following behind and did not realize that the ski in front was slowing down. The operator of the jet ski that caused the accident was arrested for OUI and underage consumption of alcohol.

    Cause of Accident: Collision with vessel
    Contributing Factors: Excessive speed, alcohol consumption

12. NARRATIVE: A 50 year old man was fishing alone at a private club and apparently fell out of his boat and drowned. The boat was located near the shore with the motor running at half-throttle. The fisherman's gear and life vest were still on board.

    Cause of Accident: Falls overboard
    Contributing Factors: Unknown

13. NARRATIVE: A 22 year old man and 16 year old boy had used a canoe on the Rock River to transport a camping party and its equipment to an island campsite. The wooden frame of the canoe was rotted in several places and the canvas skin was ripped which caused the vessel to take on water. The owner was aware that the canoe had a leak in it but had stated that they would either bail the water out or return to shore and empty the canoe before continuing its use. Later that evening, these two individuals were going downstream to check trot lines. As they approached the first trot line, one of them observed that the canoe was filling with water faster than it had in the past. The water level was about calf deep. The canoe then capsized causing the two individuals to go into the water. The 22 year old was able to make it to the shore, but the 16 year old boy drowned. The victims blood alcohol content was .117. The jury recommended that the State's Attorney's office file charges against the adults involved for giving alcohol to a minor.

    Cause of Accident: Capsizing
    Contributing Factors: Unseaworthy vessel, no PFD's, alcohol consumption

14. NARRATIVE: A 22 year old man drowned in Bluff Lake in Lake County when he apparently fell or jumped from a canoe. The canoe was found with a large amount of water in it. The man was reported to have recently been released from a rehabilitation center for alcohol problems and prior to the accident that evening had been upset and talked of suicide.

    Cause of Accident: Unknown
    Contributing Factors: No PFD

15. NARRATIVE: A 67 year old man drowned in a private pond when the boat he was fishing from capsized. It was reported that the small rowboat apparently tipped over. There were no PFD's in the craft.

Cause of Accident: Capsizing
Contributing Factors: Unknown, no PFD

16. NARRATIVE: A jon boat and a ski boat collided at approximately 8:00 p.m. The vessels were coming from opposite directions and were operating without running lights. A passenger in one of the boats was killed when he was thrown from the craft by the impact of the collision. The operator of the boat, in which the victim was a passenger, turned directly in front of the oncoming boat. The operator was charged with operating under the influence. The accident resulted in 4 other injuries, 3 minor and 1 serious.

Cause of Accident: Collision with vessel
Contributing Factors: Careless operation, alcohol consumption

17. NARRATIVE: A 14 year old girl was in the water beside the ski platform of the boat from which she was swimming. She was hit by a jet ski, the operator alleged the steering malfunctioned causing him to lose control of the ski and hit the boat. Examination of the steering mechanism indicated that the bolt which held the steering linkage together was loose. The girl died as a result of her injuries.

Cause of Accident: Collision with vessel
Contributing Factors: Possible mechanical malfunction of craft

18. NARRATIVE: Two 31 year old men were fishing from a fish/ski boat. The victim was seated on the front pedestal seat in the boat. The operator reported that he was unfamiliar with the craft and had little knowledge of boating. While getting underway he pushed the throttle too far forward and the boat quickly accelerated. The pedestal seat backs broke free from their mountings and both occupants were thrown from their seats. It is believed that the boat entered a tight left turn throwing the passenger into the water. After entering the water, the victim was struck by the propeller as it passed over him. The victim died from his injuries. The operator was arrested for operating a watercraft under the influence of alcohol, but the case was dismissed.

Cause of Accident: Falls overboard
Contributing Factors: Careless and irresponsible operation of watercraft, alcohol consumption

19. NARRATIVE: A 38 year old man, his 16 year old son and an 8 year old boy were fishing in a jon boat. The man suddenly became ill and began coughing, choking and gagging. He leaned over the boat and fell out in four feet of water and did not surface. Although PFD's were available, they were not used.

Cause of Accident: Falls overboard
Contributing Factors: Unknown

20. NARRATIVE: A 42 year old fisherman drowned after falling out of his boat while fishing alone at East Fork Lake near Olney. The investigation revealed that he was thrown overboard when he started the engine while in gear. The boat continued to turn in tight circle and he apparently lost his grip and fell overboard. He was not wearing a PFD. Witnesses stated that he had been having engine trouble and had been working on the engine just prior to the mishap.

    Cause of Accident: Falls overboard
    Contributing Factors: Mechanical problems with engine, no PFD

21. NARRATIVE: A 42 year old man drowned after the rubber raft he was paddling developed a leak and capsized. According to the report, the victim had moved his boat to its mooring on a star dock and planned to row back to the dock in an inflatable rubber dinghy which he had purchased about two weeks earlier. The first time he had inflated the dinghy he found that it had a leak which he attempted to fix the day prior to the accident. There were no PFD's aboard the craft. The victim had been drinking prior to the incident, but the amount is unknown.

    Cause of Accident: Equipment failure
    Contributing Factors: No PFD, alcohol consumption

22. NARRATIVE: Two duck hunters drowned when the boat they were in capsized. Investigations revealed evidence of boat engine problems which coupled with severe weather conditions attributed to the accident. The victims had two wearable PFD's and two type IV PFD's which were found frozen in the ice.

    Cause of Accident: Severe weather conditions, possible engine malfunction
    Contributing Factors: Not wearing PFD

23. NARRATIVE: A 42 year old man was sitting at the rear of his cabin motorboat with his girlfriend and another couple. The boat hit the wake of a larger craft which knocked everyone from their seats. The operator, who was driving the boat for the first time, lost control of the boat after it hit the wake of a larger craft. The man was thrown overboard and drowned. PFD's were available, but not worn.

    Cause of Accident: Falls overboard
    Contributing Factors: Inexperienced operator, not wearing PFD's

24. NARRATIVE: A 13 year old boy, his father and two friends were duck hunting. They were in a boat about 125 yards out when high winds swept water into the boat, which swamped and sank. All four subjects were wearing life jackets. While in the water, they were blown back to the far shore and into a section of flooded willows when the victim's father was unable to hold on to his son. The victim was washed into the willows where the water continued to wash over his head. His father reached him and held him out of the water until boats arrived. It is unclear whether the victim died from drowning or hypothermia.

    Cause of Accident: Capsizing
    Contributing Factors: Severe weather

25. NARRATIVE: A boat operator and his passenger were killed while racing another boat on the north branch of the Chicago River. Traveling at a high rate of speed the operator was attempting to pass the other boat when he rounded a curve and glanced off a moored barge striking a cement retaining wall. Witnesses to the accident reported the victims had been heavily drinking, however, this was not confirmed.

Cause of Accident: Careless/reckless operation
Contributing Factors: Possible alcohol consumption

26. NARRATIVE: The passenger of a boat died after falling from a boat in the process of locking through a dam. No one saw the victim fall and the entire mishap was reported rather vaguely. Several attempts were made to retrieve the victim and in the process several other passengers fell into the water. The victim was finally recovered in a unconscious state by the Marine Unit. Life jackets were available, however, the victim was apparently not wearing one. He died later in the hospital; the cause of death was determined as drowning. The weather conditions were rather rough that particular day which may account for the operator's inability to control the vessel combined with the currents in the locks.

Cause of Accident: Falls overboard
Contributing Factors: Poor weather conditions, inexperienced operator, not wearing PFD

27. NARRATIVE: A man drowned after he fell from his boat while fishing. The exact circumstances of the mishap remain unclear. Witnesses stated that they heard the victim yell and realized he was in the water. They tried to row towards him but could not due to strong winds and rough water. The victim's body was later recovered in seven feet of water. Although PFD's were available in the boat, they were not used.

Cause of Accident: Falls overboard
Contributing Factors: Strong winds, rough water, not wearing PFD

Accident narrative information compiled by:
Sheila White
Safety Education Administrator
Illinois Department of Conservation
Office of Law Enforcement