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ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

BOATING ACCIDENT REPORT

January 1, 1994 - December 31, 1994

Illinois Department of Conservation
life and land together

As far as recreational boating is concerned, 1994 was a pretty good year for getting out and enjoying the water. The weekend weather was generally good and the boaters took advantage of the opportunity.

The accident statistics for the year were somewhat puzzling in that the number of reported accidents jumped from 134 in 1993 to 157 in 1994. The most interesting thing about these numbers are their relationship to the number of fatalities. While 32 people died in boating accidents in 1993, that number dropped to 17 deaths in 16 fatal accidents in 1994. To what can we attribute this decline? Has education helped? Were our attempts to improve enforcement a factor? We would like to think that both of these things were in some way responsible for the decline, but only trends over time will tell us for sure.

It was noteworthy, however, that of the 17 deaths only three appeared to involve alcohol abuse. Conservation Police Officers as well as local water patrol officers in some parts of the state have increased their OUI (Operation Under Influence) enforcement efforts considerably over recent years, and it could be that these efforts have begun to pay off. Perhaps boaters are starting to get the message. Again, time will tell but these figures are encouraging.

If only three of the fatal accidents involved alcohol, what was the most common cause in the remaining 13? To find the answer to this just look at the reports for the past several years. The story is the same. <u>People weren't wearing their PFD's</u>! As you read through each narrative you will notice various causes for the accidents. Fishing too close to a dam, boating during bad weather conditions, inexperienced operators, carelessness, navigational rule violations are just some of the things that contributed to these accidents. It appears, however, that most of the victims would have stood a much better chance of survival had they been wearing their PFD.

For those of you that are instructors, there are many things that you can teach which will help boaters to avoid accidents: Learn and obey rules of the road, avoid alcohol, watch weather signs, know the limitations of your equipment--just to name a few. More than anything else, however, impressing upon people the importance of <u>wearing</u> a PFD is by far the most valuable lesson you could teach them.

Nationally, failure to wear a PFD is the number one cause of boating fatalities. There are many causes of accidents, but most people who die in boat accidents drown because, for whatever reason, they ended up in the water without a PFD.

Get creative. Find ways to impress upon others the importance of wearing a PFD. Set a good example and wear yours. It just might save your life.

Tom Wakolbinger, Deputy Chief
Office of Law Enforcement

State of Illinois

Boating Accident Report

From January 1, 1994 to December 31, 1994

Total Accidents	- 157
Injuries	- 131
Alcohol Confirmed	- 06
# of Drownings	- 15
# of Deaths From Injuries	- 02
Total Fatalities	17

PROPERTY DAMAGE (total of all vessels involved)

Total $ Amount	$185,885.00
Average $ Amount	$ 2,161.45

Number of Registered Boats - Approximately: 382,957

Month

January - 00	April - 08	July - 43	October - 03
February - 00	May - 33	August - 23	November - 02
March - 03	June - 29	September - 13	December - 00
			Total 157

Day

Monday - 21	Wednesday - 09	Friday - 17	Sunday - 52
Tuesday - 06	Thursday - 05	Saturday - 47	Total 157

County

Adams	- 09	Kane	- 01	Ogle	- 03
Calhoun	- 01	Kankakee	- 03	Peoria	- 03
Carroll	- 04	Lake	- 24	Pike	- 01
Cass	- 01	LaSalle	- 07	Putnam	- 01
Clinton	- 03	Lawrence	- 01	Rock Island	- 08
Cook	- 19	Lee	- 01	Sangamon	- 03
Dewitt	- 02	Macon	- 02	Shelby	- 01
Franklin	- 02	Macoupin	- 02	St. Clair	- 01
Greene	- 01	Madison	- 01	Stephenson	- 01
Grundy	- 09	Marion	- 01	Tazewell	- 01
Hancock	- 01	Mason	- 02	Warren	- 01
Henderson	- 02	McHenry	- 04	Whiteside	- 01
Jasper	- 01	Mercer	- 02	Will	- 05
Jefferson	- 01	Montgomery	- 01	Williamson	- 03
JoDaviess	- 08	Moultrie	- 01	Winnebago	- 07
				Total	157

Time

Midnight - 6:00 a.m.	- 08
6:01 a.m. - 12 Noon	- 21
12:01 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.	- 86
6:01 p.m. - 11:59 p.m.	- 41
Unknown	- 01
Total	157

Formal Instruction

None	- 113
U. S. Coast Guard Aux.	- 28
U. S. Power Squadron	- 07
American Red Cross	- 01
State	- 07
Other	- 13
Unknown	- 42
Total	211

Water Conditions

Calm	- 81
Choppy	- 50
Rough	- 10
Very Rough	- 06
Strong Current	- 05
Unknown	- 05
Total	157

Weather Conditions

Clear	121
Cloudy	24
Fog	01
Rain	01
Hazy	04
Snow	00
Other	06
Total	157

Boat Information

Open Motorboat	83
Cabin Motorboat	40
Auxiliary Sail	04
Sail (only)	02
Rowboat	02
Canoe	06
Jet ski	59
Other	05
Unknown	10
Total	211

Fire Extinguisher Used

Yes	04
No	171
Unknown	01
Total	176

Wind

None	15
Light	92
Moderate	29
Strong	13
Stormy	02
Unknown	06
Total	157

Visibility

Good	138
Fair	09
Poor	05
Unknown	05
Total	157

Weather Encountered

Was as forecasted	123
Not as forecasted	03
No forecast obtained	22
Unknown	09
Total	157

Operation at Time of Accident

Cruising	104
Approaching Dock	14
Water Skiing	13
Towing	01
Drifting	23
At Anchor	04
Tied to Dock	04
Fishing	13
Diving/Swimming	01
Hunting	00
Racing	01
Being Towed	00
Fueling	00
Other	19
Unknown	14
Total	211

Operator's Opinion/Cause of Accident

Alcohol - Use	12
Weather Conditions	15
Excessive Speed	21
No Proper Lookout	19
Overloading	07
Improper Loading	06
Hazardous Waters	14
Fault of Other Person	30
Drug Use	01
Fault of Hull	04
Fault of Machinery	13
Fault of Equipment	09
Other	70
Unknown	69
Total	290

Type of Accident

Grounding	09
Capsizing	11
Flooding	05
Sinking	03
Fire or Explosion (fuel)	00
Fire or Expl. (other)	01
Collision with Vessel	68
Collision with Fixed Obj.	21
Collision with Float Obj.	04
Falls Overboard	12
Falls in Boat	06
Burns	02
Hit by Boat/Propeller	01
Other	09
Unknown	05
Total	157

Body of Water

Apple Canyon Lake	- 03	Lake of Egypt	- 01
Bangs Lake	- 01	Lake Shelbyville	- 02
Calumet Sag Channel	- 02	Lake Springfield	- 03
Carlyle Lake	- 03	LaSalle Lake	- 02
Channel Lake	- 01	Lincoln Lake	- 01
Chicago River	- 02	Little Cal Sag	- 01
Clinton Lake	- 02	Little Calumet River	- 01
Crab Orchard Lake	- 02	Little Swan Lake	- 01
Diamond Lake	- 01	Long Lake	- 02
Embarras River	- 01	Mississippi River	- 30
Fox River	- 05	Newton Lake	- 01
Gillespie Lake	- 01	Nippersink Lake	- 04
Glenn Shoals Lake	- 01	Otter Lake	- 01
Grass Lake	- 03	Petite Lake	- 01
Heidecke Lake	- 02	Pistakee Bay	- 01
Illinois River	- 20	Pistakee Lake	- 01
Kankakee River	- 06	Private Club Lake	- 02
Kaskaskia River	- 01	Rend Lake	- 02
Lake Arlen	- 01	Rock River	- 12
Lake Carroll	- 03	Stephen A. Forbes	- 01
Lake Decatur	- 02	Superior Lake	- 01
Lake Marie	- 01	Wolf Lake	- 01
Lake Michigan	- 20	Yellow Creek	- 01
		Total	157

Education

Operator experience

Age	Less Than 20 Hours	20 to 100 Hours	100 to 500 Hours	Over 500 Hours	Unknown	Total
< - 10	01	00	00	00	00	01
10 - 12	01	00	00	00	00	01
13 - 17	07	02	01	00	03	13
18 - 19	05	04	01	00	00	10
20 - 29	16	18	11	01	02	48
30 - 39	09	12	20	08	05	54
40 - 49	08	05	20	08	05	46
50 - 59	01	05	10	07	02	25
60 - 69	01	00	05	01	01	08
70 - Over	00	00	01	00	00	01
Unknown	01	00	01	00	02	04
Total	50	46	70	25	20	211

Age	With Formal Instruction	Without Formal Instruction	Unknown	Total
< - 10	00	01	00	01
10 - 12	00	01	00	01
13 - 17	03	06	04	13
18 - 19	01	09	00	10
20 - 29	12	28	08	48
30 - 39	12	31	11	54
40 - 49	14	19	13	46
50 - 59	09	13	03	25
60 - 69	01	00	00	01
70 - Over	01	00	00	01
Unknown	03	05	03	11
	56	113	42	211

NARRATIVES FOR 1994 FATAL BOATING ACCIDENTS

There were 157 recreational boating accidents in 1994. Of those, 16 involved fatalities, killing 17 boaters. One of the 16 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 16 accidents where 17 boaters lost their lives.

1. Two fishermen were trying to cross a shallow water lake during strong winds. The craft was a 12 foot jon boat powered by a 5 hp motor. The operator was inexperienced and a non-swimmer. The boat was swamped and capsized. The passenger swam to shore leaving the operator with the boat. Both were wearing life jackets. The passenger had to search his way through flooded timber and push himself through deep mud until he finally reached a state highway. From there he walked to the home of a friend to report the incident. The friend had already gone out to look for the two lost boaters. Four hours elapsed before the body of the operator was found. The coroner determined that he died from drowning. Hypothermia was also listed as a factor in his death. The accident occurred on Saw Mill Lake in Putnam County.

   Contributing factors: - Operator inexperience
   - Adverse weather conditions
   - Hypothermia

2. The operator of a boat was having trouble getting his 14-foot jon boat off the trailer at the Whitley Creek access area of Lake Shelbyville. Witnesses stated that when he got the boat into the water it was at full throttle. As the operator attempted to maneuver the boat back to the boat dock to pick up a passenger, he was thrown into the water. There was no kill switch and lanyard on the motor so the boat continued to circle after the operator was thrown out. Witnesses watched as he struggled to stay afloat and at the same time avoid being hit by the prop. The operator was not wearing a PFD. Rescuers were on the scene within 15 minutes but the operator disappeared under the surface of the water. His body was recovered about three hours later. The coroner determined that he died from drowning. It was later learned that his boat was only rated for a 10 hp motor but was equipped with a 15 hp motor.

   Contributing factors: - Victim not wearing a PFD
   - No lanyard and kill switch
   - Boat overpowered
   - Excessive speed

3. Four fishermen were trolling below the dam on the Mississippi River in Hancock County. The current started to take the boat back upstream towards the dam. The operator tried to start the motor and flooded it. The trolling motor was insufficient to pull the boat out of the current and away from the dam. One of the passengers began pulling out life jackets but two of the men jumped out of the boat. One made it to the dam wall. The other did not. The boat nosed into the boil, spun around and stood on its side. A third occupant was either thrown or jumped from the boat and drowned. The fourth occupant was able to put on two life jackets before being thrown into the water. He was picked up downstream by other boaters.

   Contributing factors: - No proper lookout
   - Failure of all occupants to wear PFDs

4. Four men took a newly purchased boat out on Heidecke Lake in Grundy County to do some fishing. They had only been on the water for about an hour when the wind started to pick up and they decided to go back to the dock. As they turned into the wind to head back to the dock, a wave crashed over the front of the boat. Then a second and third wave hit and the boat started sinking quickly. Life jackets were passed out and the boat rolled as it went under. Two of the men held on to the overturned boat and the other two were about 30 yards away holding on to coolers. One man drifted away still clinging to the cooler. The other man complained that his clothes were weighing him down so he took off his life jacket to remove his coat. His PFD was swept away by a wave. One of the men left the boat and swam over to the man who had lost his life jacket and tried to assist him back to the boat. He lost consciousness and his friend tried to hold him up until help arrived. The two survivors at the boat started to suffer from hypothermia and were nauseated by the leaking gas from the gas tank. They decided that their only chance for survival was to swim for shore. Fortunately, they were rescued by another fisherman as was the first man who drifted away with the cooler. The fourth subject drowned.

   Contributing factors: - Inexperience with watercraft
   - Adverse weather and hazardous water
   - Failure to keep PFD on in the water
   - Hypothermia

5. Four fishermen were bank pole fishing in a 12 foot jon boat on the Embarras River in Lawrence County. They were working their way upstream when the operator turned the boat into its own backwash and it capsized. Three of the occupants were able to swim to shore. The operator drowned. There were no PFDs available in the boat.

   Contributing factors: - No PFDs available in boat
   - Possible carelessness of operator
   - Possible overloading

6. Two jet skis were travelling together with a third jet ski following behind. The two lead jet skis made an abrupt turn to the right. The operator of the third jet ski made an evasive turn to the left but could not avoid striking one of the jet skis. The operator of this ski was killed. The report is unclear whether or not the victim was wearing a PFD although the report indicates that the victim died from internal injuries. The accident occurred at the Essex Lake Recreation Club in Kankakee County.

   Contributing factors: - Carelessness
   - Navigational rule violation

7. Four friends decided to go canoeing on Yellow Creek in Stephenson County using two canoes. It was dark when they got to the low head dam in Krape Park. They put their canoes into the south bank of Yellow Creek and portaged them around the dam. The first pair put their canoe in and the second pair put their canoe in between the first pair and the dam. As they shoved off, the canoe's bow turned into the dam and in spite of their frantic paddling, was pulled into the spillway and capsized. One of the canoeists was able to free himself from the boil but his companion drowned. The canoes were only equipped with Type IV PFDs (throwables).

   Contributing factors: - Inexperience
   - No wearable PFDs available or worn

8. A father and his 14 year old son were boating on the Illinois River near Peoria. The father was operating the boat and passing a barge. When he got well beyond the barge, he turned to cross in front of it. At that moment the motor stalled out and the operator was unable to restart it. He yelled to his son to jump and he did. The boat was struck by the barge and the operator was trapped inside. In a dramatic rescue, the operator was freed from the boat by rescuers using a chain saw. His son drowned. The youth was not wearing a PFD. Although the father claimed that the motor malfunctioned, the subsequent accident investigation could not substantiate his claim.

   Contributing factors: - Failure of victim to wear PFD
   - Possible equipment failure
   - Possible carelessness of operator

9. Two men were salmon fishing on Lake Michigan when a fishing line became entangled in the prop of the trolling motor which was being used for propulsion. The trolling motor then stopped. Waves began splashing over the transom, flooding the boat. Attempts to start the primary 115 hp motor failed. Waves continued to pour over the transom. The operator attempted to hail another vessel via marine band radio but failed due to water flooding the battery compartment of the boat. The passenger was wearing a type III PFD and placed an orange Type II over the other one. The operator went to the forward storage compartment to use his flares but lost them overboard. About the same time, the passenger disappeared from the boat. It is unknown whether he fell overboard or abandoned ship. The operator tried to throw him a type IV PFD but was unsuccessful as the boat drifted away. The operator remained with the boat until a U. S. Coast Guard helicopter spotted him. He gestured to the helicopter that there was another person in the water. The helicopter then proceeded to locate the other fisherman. He was found face down in the water. Attempts to resuscitate him failed. The cause of death was drowning although hypothermia was also listed as a factor in his death. The operator was rescued by a charter boat and was treated for hypothermia at a local hospital.

   Contributing factors: - Equipment failure
   - Hypothermia

10. A woman died after the boat she was a passenger in exploded shortly after being fueled. Her husband was operating the boat and was also burned in the explosion. Both occupants jumped from the burning boat and were picked up by a passing boat. A comprehensive investigation revealed that the boat was equipped with some automotive parts where marine parts should have been used. The fuel tank had been moved from the location where it had been installed by the factory to a new location chosen by the boat owner. There was evidence that the fuel system was not installed to today's standards, although there is not a definitive causal relationship between these modifications and the boat fire. However, the operator was in violation for operating a motorboat without a USCG approved carburetor arrestor and without proper ventilation of the engine and fuel tank compartment. Although neither the operator nor the victim were wearing PFDs, this was not a contributing factor in the accident. The victim died from injuries (burns) sustained in the explosion. The accident occurred on the Mississippi River in Rock Island County.

    Contributing factors: - Equipment malfunction/failure

11. Two youths were fishing out of a canoe on a strip pit lake at the Wilmington Recreation Club in Will County. A storm approached and the boys began frantically rowing toward shore. One of the boys became light-headed from the exertion and collapsed to the side of the canoe, capsizing it. He was unable to swim to shore and drowned. The second youth swam safely to shore. There were no PFDs available in the canoe.

    Contributing factors: - No PFDs available
    - Inexperience

12. A 17-year old youth drowned while learning to water ski on Little Swan Lake in Warren County. Witnesses stated that they were trying to get the youth up on his skis when he went down. The operator noticed that he wasn't moving and jumped in to assist. The Knox County coroner was boating on the lake at the same time and came over to assist. The victim was given CPR until the ambulance arrived, but never revived. He was pronounced dead at a local hospital. The coroner speculated that the victim panicked when he fell and inhaled water. The victim was a swimmer and was wearing a PFD.

    Contributing factors: - Victim's inexperience as a skier

13. Two men decided to go boating on Lake Decatur after having a few beers. One of the men had been operating the boat and left it idling while he went to the rear of the boat to relieve himself over the side. His companion took over control of the boat. The companion stated that he heard a splash, saw feet, and then nothing. He threw a type IV PFD over the side in the direction of the splash and spent about ten minutes looking for his friend. He then motored back to the Park District marina and called the police for help. When the police arrived, they arrested him for Operating a Watercraft Under the Influence (OUI). A dive team began a search and the body was finally recovered four days later. The victim was not wearing a PFD although one was available in the boat. The report does not indicate whether an autopsy was performed and a blood alcohol content of the victim obtained. BAC of victim = .21; urine alcohol = .358

    Contributing factors: - Failure to wear a PFD

14. A man left home to go out and work on the motor of his boat on Clinton Lake in DeWitt County. His boat was found empty and idling. A search ensued and the victim's body was found two days later. The circumstances surrounding his death are unknown. It is speculated that he got hot after working on his motor and decided to take a swim. It is also possible that he lost his balance while working on the motor and fell overboard. The coroner's report indicated that he had a blood alcohol content of .078. Although this is less than the legal presumptive level for OUI (.10), it is high enough to be considered a contributing factor in the accident.

Contributing factors:
- Failure to wear a PFD
- Boating alone
- Possible impairment due to blood alcohol level near the presumptive level of .10

15. After a night of heavy drinking, two men decided to canoe across Bangs Lake in Lake County to get home. Approximately 100-150 feet from shore the canoe tipped over. One of the occupants made it to shore, the other did not. The survivor stated that he told his friend not to paddle because he was causing the canoe to wobble. The victim stopped for a while but then started paddling again saying that he felt guilty that his friend had to paddle alone. The victim's body was recovered a few hours later. The coroner's report indicated that he had a blood alcohol content of .175 and metabolites of cannabis. Although PFDs were available, they were not used.

Contributing factors:
- Excessive alcohol consumption
- Illegal drug use
- Failure to wear a PFD
- Inexperience

16. Two men were fishing on the Illinois River in Grundy County. They were fishing along the rock portion by the north end of the Dresden lock and dam when their trolling motor started to hit some rocks. They were trying to push the boat off of the rocks when they realized that the back current was drawing them toward the lock. The operator tried to start the main motor but could not get it to trim down. He told his companion to continue working the trim button while he tried to manually lower the motor. Unsuccessful, they began to paddle to avoid the lock but it was too late. The boat was pulled into the lock and capsized. The survivor was pulled under the water and resurfaced approximately 50 yards downstream. The operator never resurfaced. His body was finally found by a tugboat operator almost a month later. Neither of the men were wearing life jackets at the time of the accident.

Contributing factors:
- Failure to wear PFD
- Careless inattention