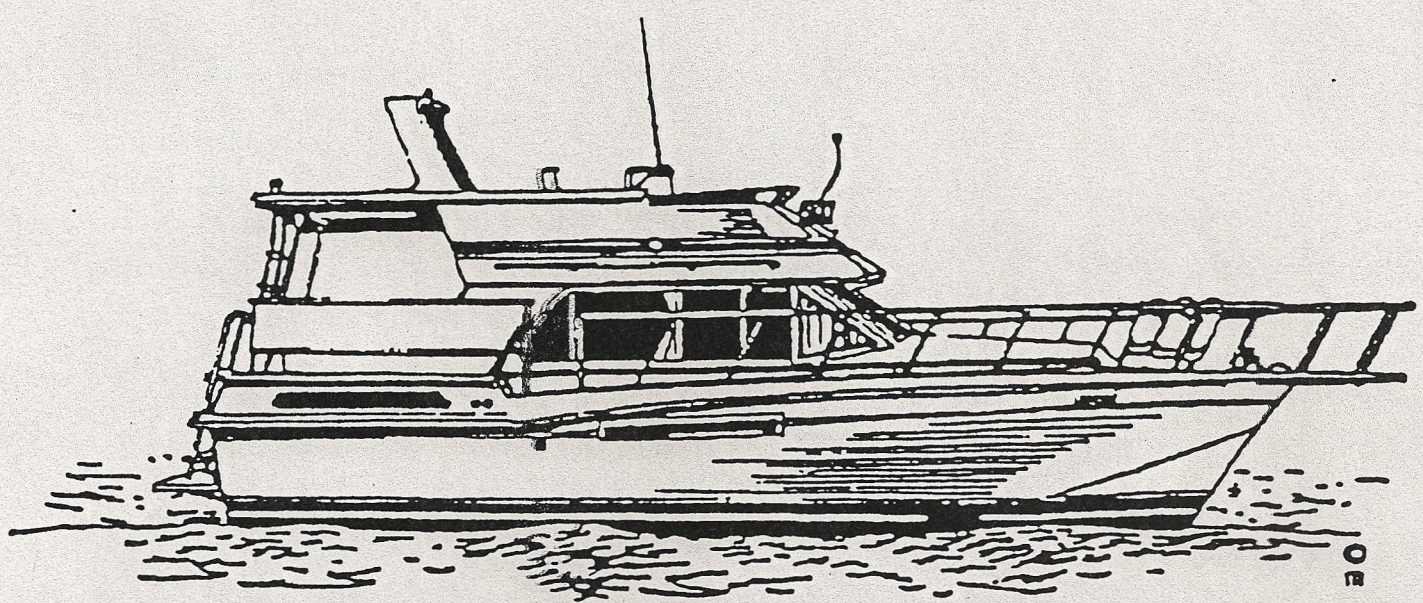
ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

BOATING ACCIDENT REPORT

January 1, 1998 - December 31, 1998



Illinois
Department of
Natural Resources

BOAT SMART FROM THE START
WEAR YOUR LIFE JACKET

This is the theme for the 1999 National Safe Boating week campaign. National Safe Boating Week this year is May 22 - 28, 1999. This simple message goes right to the issue that continues to be the single primary cause of most boating fatalities. There were 176 recreational boating accidents last year killing 19 people. Illinois' numbers for 1998 are consistent with national statistics in that 70% of all fatalities presumably could have been prevented if the victim had worn an approved life saving device. Six of the people who lost their lives last year in Illinois boating accidents died of causes unrelated to PFD use but clearly, once again, the single most important thing a person can do to save their life in a boating accident is to wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved PFD.

Seven of 1998's boating fatalities (37%) show alcohol abuse as a contributing cause. This is a significant number and Illinois Conservation Police Officers continue to put a high priority on OUI (Operation Under the Influence) enforcement statewide. The number of arrests for OUI in 1998 was up by 17 for a total of 176 which shows that alcohol abuse by some recreational boaters continues to be a significant problem. It is not known what percentage of all reported accidents involve alcohol abuse because, unless someone dies or is seriously injured, the accidents are seldom reported until well after the fact and testing of the operator is not possible.

Of the 387,523 registered boats in this state, 14,693 or 3.8%, are PWCs. Personal watercraft continue to represent a disproportionate number of reportable accidents at 44 for 1998. This amounts to exactly 25% of all reported accidents. A combined education/enforcement effort between the DNR offices of Law Enforcement and Education for 1999 will target PWC operators in areas of highest use in an attempt to reach this segment of the boating public.

To the many volunteer instructors, who teach boating safety to the citizens of Illinois, thank you for your time, dedication, and service in this critical element of Illinois' boating program. Please use the information contained in this report to illustrate the importance of obeying regulations, being courteous toward other boaters and most of all, wearing an approved PFD.

Tom Wakolbinger, Chief
Office of Law Enforcement

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
BOATING ACCIDENT REPORT
1998

Total Accidents	-	176	Property Damage -	(total of	
Injuries	-	107	all vessels involved)		
# of Drownings	-	12	Total $ Amount	$533,465.00	
Died from Injury	-	7	Average $ Amount	$ 2,270.06	
Alcohol Confirmed	-	26			

MONTH

January	- 0	April	- 5	July	- 52	October	- 4
February	- 1	May	- 26	August	- 36	November	- 0
March	- 5	June	- 28	September	- 18	December	- 1
						TOTAL	176

DAY

Monday	- 8	Wednesday	- 8	Friday	- 16	Sunday	- 74
Tuesday	- 3	Thursday	- 9	Saturday	- 57	TOTAL	176

TIME

Midnight - 6:00 a.m.	10
6:01 a.m. - Noon	27
12:01 p.m.- 6:00 p.m.	103
6:01 p.m. - 11:59 p.m.	32
Unknown -	4
TOTAL	176

FIRE EXTINGUISHER USED

Yes	16
No	211
Unknown	1
TOTAL	228

FORMAL INSTRUCTIONS

None	128
U.S. Coast Guard Aux	28
U.S. Power Squadron	9
American Red-Cross	1
State	19
Other	28
Unknown	36
TOTAL	249

WATER CONDITIONS

Calm	88
Choppy	58
Rough	16
Very Rough	5
Strong Current	5
Unknown	4
TOTAL	176

AGE	<20 HRS	20-100 HRS	100-500 HRS	>500 HRS	UNKNOWN	TOTAL
< - 10	0	0	0	0	0	0
10 - 12	0	0	0	0	0	0
13 - 17	5	3	4	0	1	13
18 - 19	5	5	1	1	0	12
20 - 29	10	14	20	4	7	55
30 - 39	6	13	24	16	7	66
40 - 49	7	15	13	9	3	47
50 - 59	2	3	8	9	4	26
60 - 69	1	2	2	0	0	5
70 - Over	0	0	1	1	0	2
Unknown	1	0	4	2	16	23
TOTAL	37	55	77	42	38	249

	WITH FORMAL INST.	WITHOUT FORMAL INST	UNKNOWN	TOTAL
< - 10	0	0	0	0
10 - 12	0	0	0	0
13 - 17	8	5	0	13
18 - 19	4	8	0	12
20 - 29	14	34	7	55
30 - 39	18	42	6	66
40 - 49	18	25	4	47
50 - 59	17	6	3	26
60 - 69	0	0	0	0
70 - over	0	2	0	2
Unknown	3	4	16	23
TOTAL	85	128	36	249

WEATHER INFORMATION

Clear	-	149
Cloudy	-	18
Fog	-	1
Rain	-	4
Snow	-	0
Hazy	-	1
Other	-	3
TOTAL	-	176

BOAT INFORMATION

Open Motorboat	-	105
Cabin Motorboat	-	34
Auxiliary Sail	-	12
Sail (Only)	-	3
Rowboat	-	0
Canoe	-	4
Jet Ski	-	66
Other	-	6
Unknown	-	15
TOTAL	-	234

WIND			VISIBILITY			WEATHER ENCOUNTERED		
None	-	30	Good	-	150	Was as Forecasted	-	65
Light	-	80	Fair	-	14	Not as Forecasted	-	3
Moderate	-	42	Poor	-	9	No Forecast Obtained	-	21
Strong	-	17	Unknown	-	3	Unknown	-	87
Stormy	-	2	TOTAL	-	176	TOTAL	-	176
Unknown	-	5						
TOTAL	-	176						

OPERATION TIME OF ACCIDENT			TYPE OF ACCIDENT		
Cruising	-	159	Grounding	-	4
Approaching Dock	-	13	Capsizing	-	13
Water Skiing	-	9	Flooding	-	6
Racing	-	0	Sinking	-	7
Towing	-	5	Fire or Expl. (Fuel)	-	5
Being Towed	-	4	Fire of Expl. (Other)	-	0
Drifting	-	18	Coll. With Vessel	-	72
At Anchor	-	11	Coll. With Fixed Obj.	-	31
Tied to Dock	-	7	Coll. With Float Obj.	-	5
Fueling	-	0	Falls Overboard	-	9
Fishing	-	1	Falls in Boat	-	6
Hunting	-	0	Burns	-	0
Skin Diving/Swim	-	0	Hit by Boat/Propel	-	6
Other	-	8	Other	-	1
Unknown	-	14	Unknown	-	2
TOTAL	-	235	TOTAL	-	176

OPERATORS OPINION/CAUSE OF ACCIDENT

Alcohol Use	-	23	Fault of Other Person	-	66
Weather Conditions	-	12	Drug Use	-	1
Excessive Speed	-	29	Fault of Hull	-	2
No Proper Lookout	-	12	Fault of Machinery	-	10
Overloading	-	3	Fault of Equipment	-	5
Improper Loading	-	2	Other	-	13
Hazardous Waters	-	48	Unknown	-	13
			TOTAL	-	239

COUNTY

Adams	3	Jersey	5	Piatt	1
Bond	1	JoDaviess	2	Randolph	1
Bureau	1	Johnson	1	Richland	1
Calhoun	1	Kane	1	Rock Island	12
Carroll	1	Kankakee	2	Sangamon	4
Cass	1	Lake	25	Shelby	6
Clinton	4	LaSalle	10	St Clair	1
Cook	19	Lee	1	Tazewell	2
DeWitt	6	Livingston	1	Union	1
Franklin	3	Macon	1	Vermilion	2
Fulton	2	Madison	1	Washington	1
Gallatin	1	Marshall	2	Whiteside	1
Greene	1	Mason	3	Will	4
Grundy	7	McHenry	9	Williamson	4
Henderson	2	Mercer	1	Winnebago	3
Jackson	1	Moultrie	3	TOTAL	176
Jefferson	1	Peoria	9		

BODY OF WATER

Apple Canyon Lake	1	Lake Holiday	1
Baldwin Lake	1	Lake Marie	1
Big Muddy River	1	Lake Michigan	23
Big Sandy Creek	1	Lake of Egypt	3
Bora Lake	1	Lake Shelbyville	8
Calumet River	1	Lake Springfield	3
Canton Lake	1	Lake Vermilion	1
Carlyle Lake	4	LaSalle Lake	1
Channel Lake	1	Lincoln Lake	3
Chgo. Ship/San Canal	1	Long Lake	1
Chicago River	5	Mansfield Assoc. Lake	1
Clinton Lake	6	Mississippi River	20
Coal City Area Club	1	Nippersink Lake	1
Crab Orchard Lake	2	Ohio River	1
Des Plaines River	3	Petite Lake	2
Fox River	10	Pistakee Lake	3
Governor Bond Lake	1	Rend Lake	4
Grass Lake	3	Rock River	5
I & M Canal	1	Sangchris Lake	1
Illinois River	32	Spoon River	1
Kankakee River	5	Spring Lake	1
Kaskaskia River	1	Vermilion River	2
Kinkaid Lake	1	Wash. Co. Cons. Area Lake	1
Kishwaukee River	1	Weinel Lake	1
Lake Carroll	1	TOTAL	176
Lake Decatur	1		

SUMMARY OF FATAL BOATING ACCIDENTS

There were 176 boating accidents in 1998. Of those, 16 involved fatalities, killing 19 boaters. Three of these 16 accidents involved double fatalities. 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 19 boaters lost their lives.

1. A canoe occupied by two young men went over the low-head dam on the Spoon River in Fulton County. One occupant swam to shore, the other drowned. The Spoon River was above normal pool with accelerated current and a water temperature of 38 degrees F. The drop from upstream to downstream was about five feet. The survivor stated that he and his companion had been canoeing uneventfully until they reached the dam. They slowed down and discussed whether or not they should "shoot the dam". The closer to the dam they got, they realized that the drop was too great and attempted to paddle to shore. The current was too strong and they went over the dam. The canoe capsized and both occupants were thrown out. Although personal floatation devices (PFDs) were available in the canoe, they were not used.

Cause of death: Drowning
Contributing factors:
A. Careless operation
B. Hazardous waters
C. Failure to wear PFDs.

2. A 14-year old youth died within the hour after the boat he was a passenger in was struck broadside by another vessel on Lake of Egypt in Johnson County. The victim's boat was coming out of a cove when it was struck by the second vessel. The operator of the second vessel was cited for failure to yield the right of way and careless operation. The report is unclear whether or not the victim was wearing a PFD. However wearing a PFD was not a factor in the youth's death. He died from blunt trauma from being hit by the boat.

Cause of death: Trauma
Contributing factors
A. Careless operation
B. Failure to yield the right of way

3. A boat was found capsized on Washington County Lake in Washington County. The operator's hat was found on top of the boat. The operator was found about two weeks later. The coroner's report revealed that the victim's blood alcohol content was .258. It is unknown why the boat capsized. Although PFDs were found with the boat, it appears that the victim was not wearing one.

Cause of death: Drowning
Contributing factors:
A. Operating under the influence
B. Failure to wear PFD
C. Other factors unknown.

4. An inexperienced canoeist met his death in the rain-swollen waters of the Vermilion River in Vermilion County. Family members became concerned when the canoeist did not arrive at his destination at the agreed upon time. They advised officers that the young man was not an experienced canoeist and that he was unfamiliar with the Vermillion River and was unaware of a low-head dam on the river. There were no witnesses to the accident but the canoe was found torn in half approximately 400 yards downstream from the dam. Shortly after the find of the canoe, the canoeist was found drowned, approximately 300 yards downstream of the dam. It is unknown whether or not there were any PFDs available in the canoe. It would appear that none was worn since none was found on the victim's body at the time of his recovery.

Cause of death: Drowning
Contributing factors:

A. Operator inexperience (both with canoeing and with the river)
B. Hazardous waters
C. (Probable) Failure to wear PFD

5. A fisherman drowned after the boat he was a passenger in capsized on the Kishwaukee River in Winnebago County. Recent rains had raised the water level and caused a dramatic increase in the river's current. According to the survivor, the two were fishing out of their anchored boat when suddenly the current picked up. They pulled up their anchor and the boat was caught in the current and pulled downstream sideways. The victim became very nervous and moved suddenly within the boat which caused it to flip. Although PFDs were available in the boat, they were not used by either the survivor or the victim.

Cause of death: Drowning
Contributing factors:

A. Hazardous waters
B. (Possible) Inexperience of both occupants in dealing with the boat in high water conditions
C. Failure to wear PFD

6. A personal watercraft operator died after his PWC collided with a pleasure boat on Lake Vermilion in Vermilion County. The victim was traveling in the wrong direction (lake rule) and failed to yield the right of way to the other vessel. The victim was on a borrowed PWC and had little if any personal watercraft operating experience. Although the victim was wearing a PFD at the time of the crash, it did not play a role in his death. He died of massive head injuries received in the collision.

Cause of death: Trauma
Contributing factors:

A. Failure to yield the right of way in a crossing situation
B. Operator inexperience
C. Failure to follow lake rule regarding direction of travel.

7. An 18-year old man drowned after the overloaded canoe he was in capsized on Long Lake in Lake County. All of the occupants had been at a party and decided to go fishing a little before midnight. One survivor claimed that the canoe began taking on water and then capsized approximately 200 yards from shore. The victim's body was recovered approximately 130 yards from shore. A plastic bag with a green leafy substance was found in his pocket. The coroner's report revealed that although the victim had no drugs in his system, his BAC was .10 with much higher levels in both urine and vitreous fluid. No PFDs were available in the boat or used by any of the occupants.

Cause of death: Drowning
Contributing factors:
A. Overloading
B. Under the influence of alcohol
C. No PFDs available or used

8. Very little information is available on this accident. The coroner's report indicated that the victim stood up in his boat causing it to capsize. The victim's BAC was .226 and metabolites of cocaine were also present in his system. Newspaper accounts of the accident report that the victim was fishing on Gamlin Lake in St. Clair County with another person. Their boat capsized after the victim abruptly stood up in the boat. There is no indication from either report whether PFDs were present or used.

Cause of death: Drowning
Contributing factors:
A. Under the influence of alcohol and controlled substance
B. PFD use unknown

9. A fishing boat was found capsized in the Big Muddy River in Union County. The operator was found two days later approximately 190 yards downstream from where the boat was found. Although PFDs were available in the boat, they were not used by the victim.

Cause of death: Drowning
Contributing factors:
A. PFDs were not used
B. Factors leading up to why the boat capsized are unknown

10. A pleasure boat was crossing in front of barges when it struck the lead barge head on, on the Illinois River in Jersey County. There were conflicting reports as to who was actually operating the boat. Two occupants of the pleasure boat, a married couple, were killed. The female victim had a BAC of .126 . The male victim had a BAC of .193. Both had metabolites of cocaine and methamphetamine in their system also. Although PFDs were available in the boat, they were not used.

Cause of death: Both victims drowned
Contributing factors:
A. Under the influence of alcohol and controlled substances
B. Failure to wear PFDs
C. Careless operation

11. While jumping the wake created by a boat on the Illinois River in Bureau County, a Sea Doo wave runner entered into the immediate path of another vessel and was struck. Although the operator of the wave runner was wearing a PFD, he was killed on impact. The Coroner's report revealed that the victim's BAC was .07, slightly below the legal limit of .08 for operating under the influence.

Cause of death: Trauma
Contributing factors:
A. Under the influence of alcohol
B. Operational violation (jumping wakes)
C. Excessive speed of second vessel

12. Two passengers on a pleasure boat on Clinton Lake in DeWitt County, fell off the bow of the boat when the operator made a sudden turn. Both were struck by the prop and one died from his injuries. It was determined from the investigation that the operator deliberately made the sharp turn to throw his passengers overboard, most likely as a "prank". The coroner's jury reached a finding of homicide without criminal intent. Warrants were issued for the operator for involuntary manslaughter and reckless conduct. Although PFDs were not worn by the victim, it was not a factor in his death since he died from injuries sustained from the prop.

Cause of death: Trauma
Contributing factors:
A. Careless operation

13. Although the victim was alone in his boat on the Mississippi River in Adams County, a tow boat operator observed the accident and was able to provide information as to what happened. The tow operator observed the boat stop in the water. The operator began walking to the rear of the boat when his foot seemed to slip and he fell. His head and/or neck hit the transom of the boat and he fell overboard. The victim appeared to sink immediately and never surfaced. The coroner's report revealed that the victim's BAC was .185. Although PFDs were available in the boat, the victim was not wearing one at the time of the mishap.

Cause of death: Drowning
Contributing factors:
A. Under the influence of alcohol
B. Failure to wear PFD

14. Four young duck hunters were attempting to reach their blind on the Coal city Area Club Lake in Grundy County, when their overloaded boat capsized. Two of the hunters drowned while attempting to swim to shore. The survivors reported that three of the four hunters were sitting in the bow of the boat. As the boat started moving, water came over the bow causing it to capsize. There were no PFDs available in the boat. The investigating officer's report revealed that the boat was overloaded by more than two and a half times more than it could handle based on U.S. Coast Guard standards.

Cause of death: Drowning
Contributing factors:
A. Boat overloaded
B. Failure to wear PFD

15. Two vessels collided at night on Nippersink Lake in Lake County. One passenger was killed on impact. Another passenger was thrown overboard and when he was found, it was determined that he too died of blunt trauma. The operator of the other boat was arrested for OUI and his BAC was .129. Neither victim was wearing a PFD but that was not a factor in their death.

Cause of death: Both died of blunt trauma
Contributing factors:

A. Operating under the influence of alcohol
B. Excessive speed
C. Operator inattention

16. Two fishermen attempted to anchor their boat under a bridge on Rend Lake in Franklin County. It was a December day with the lake experiencing whitecaps and the water temperature about 44 degrees. When the anchor touched the bottom of the lake, the boat spun around, the bow dipped and water came over the bow, swamping the boat. The operator immediately put on a Type II PFD and threw a Type IV to his passenger. The operator was pulled away from the boat by the current. He looked back and saw that his companion had put the Type IV PFD on his back. The passenger then began swimming toward shore but soon went under the surface of the water. The report is unclear as to whether or not there were any wearable PFDs available on board.

Cause of death: Hypothermia followed by drowning
Contributing factors:

A. Improper anchoring
B. Improper use of a PFD
C. Hazardous waters
D. Severe weather