



2011 PENNSYLVANIA BOATING ACCIDENT ANALYSIS

By Ryan C. Walt – Boating & Watercraft Safety Manager

The total number of reported recreational boating accidents in Pennsylvania in 2011 increased from 2010. Boaters and Waterways Conservation Officers reported 86 recreational boating accidents of all types, an increase of 14 reported accidents, or 16% over 2010. The number of vessels involved in reported accidents totaled 99, an increase of seven from 2010. Accident reports indicated 57 injuries requiring medical treatment, four less than in 2010. Property damage to vessels totaled \$196,563, which was \$34,013 less than the figure reported in the previous year. One accident comprised \$50,000 or 25% of that total. Federal and state law requires that accidents involving death, disappearance, injuries requiring medical treatment beyond first aid, and property damage exceeding \$2,000 be reported to the state. Accidents with lesser property damage and/or minor injuries are not required to be reported and the PFBC does not have data for these incidents.

The number of registered boats in which Pennsylvanians plied the waterways continued to decrease in 2011. This decline was primarily in one class of boats, motorboats less than 16 feet in length, and has declined steadily since 2000.

Of the 86 reported accidents in 2011, the most common type was collisions (including striking a submerged object). Thirteen of the collisions occurred between vessels. The types of reported accidents were as follows:

Falls overboard	18	Collision with fixed object	4
Capsizing	15	Flooding/swamping	3
Collision with vessel	13	Struck submerged object	3
Skier mishap	7	Struck by boat	2
Fall in boat	7	Sinking	1
Person leaves/ejected from vessel	6	Grounding	1
Fire/explosion	5	Hit and run	1

Twenty-two recreational boating accidents resulted in an equal number of fatalities. This is fifteen more fatalities than the number reported in 2010 and the second highest since 1992. In addition, it is above the last 10-year average of 12 victims. Factoring in the 2011 fatalities, Pennsylvania's new 10-year average is 12.8 victims. Only three of the 22 victims were wearing a life jacket at the time of the mishap that resulted in death. In sixteen of the accidents there were wearable life jackets onboard the boat but the victims did not wear them.

The attached "Recap of 2011 Pennsylvania Boating Fatalities" is a summary of all fatal recreational boating accidents in the Commonwealth that year. The recap's last page details statistical information about 2011's fatal boating accidents. This recap is intended to provide information to illustrate the importance of safe boating practices and to help improve boating safety in the Commonwealth.

5. 1 Fatality Youghiogheny River Fayette County
5/21/11 3:20 p.m. Saturday

A **31-year-old man** lost his life when his **12-foot kayak** capsized. The victim was paddling with a friend on the Youghiogheny River when the friend capsized and swam to shore. The victim remained in his boat and attempted to retrieve his friend's kayak downstream then disappeared from view due to a bend in the river. The victim's empty kayak was observed traveling over the South Connellsville Dam a short while later. Both kayakers had wearable PFDs shoved into the bow but **neither paddler was wearing a lifejacket**. The kayakers were designed to be used on flatwater, not whitewater, and neither had spray skirts. The victim had no whitewater paddling experience and **no formal boating safety education**. It is not known if the victim could swim. Water levels were three times the normal level. The air temperature was in the low 80s and the water temperature was in the low 50s so **hypothermia or sudden immersion into cold water (cold water shock) may have been factors**.

6. 1 Fatality Lehigh River Lehigh County
5/25/11 7:30 p.m. Wednesday

A **53-year-old woman** lost her life when she launched a **13-foot fiberglass canoe** to rescue two dogs that appeared to be swept downstream by the strong current. One hour later the empty canoe was discovered approximately ½ mile downstream from where she launched. Her body was recovered at Kimmel's Lock eight miles downstream the following weekend. The air temperature was in the upper 70s but the water temperature was 63 degrees. The victim was not properly dressed for the water temperature and **was not wearing a lifejacket. In fact, there were no lifejackets onboard**. The water temperature was in the low 60s so **hypothermia or sudden immersion into cold water (cold water shock) may have been factors**. The victim had a health condition that may have contributed to her drowning. It is unknown if the victim could swim. The victim had some boating experience but **no formal boating safety education**.

7. 1 Fatality Delaware River Pike County
5/28/11 2:30 p.m. Saturday

A **71-year-old man** lost his life when he fell overboard while rafting on a rented **12-foot inflatable raft**. The victim was rafting with three other passengers on the Delaware River when they encountered a set of rapids in the area of Butler's Riff. According to the passengers on the raft, the victim went under and never resurfaced. **The victim and other passengers onboard were not wearing lifejackets**. The victim was an experienced boater but had no formal boating safety education. Water levels were high and the current was swift. **Sudden immersion into cold water (cold water shock) and the physical condition of the victim may have been factors**. In addition, **alcohol use may have been a factor**. The victim's body was recovered two days later, approximately 20 miles from the original search site.

8. 1 Fatality Lake Erie Erie County
5/30/11 6:25 p.m. Monday

A **25-year-old woman** lost her life when the **32-foot cabin motorboat** she was onboard caught fire and exploded. The boat's operator was having trouble starting the engine after refueling the boat's fuel tanks. There was an issue with the fuel tank and vent and when the engine turned over it ignited the fuel causing an explosion. There were five others injured in the accident. Of the six passengers onboard, **the victim and four others were not wearing lifejackets**. Only one passenger, an infant, was wearing a lifejacket and escaped with minor injuries. It is not known if the victim could swim although it would not have been a factor in survival. The operator of the boat was not an experienced boater and **had no formal boating safety education**.

9. 1 Fatality Foster Joseph Sayers Dam Centre County
6/3/11 5:00 p.m. Friday

A **70-year-old man** lost his life when he fell overboard while trying to launch an **18-foot pontoon boat**. The boat operator and victim were preparing to launch the pontoon boat that was moored in the marina. The victim was on the dock and released the dock lines. As he attempted to board the boat, a wind gust caught the boat and pushed it away from the dock. The victim held on to the railing, was pulled off the dock and fell into the water. The victim **was not wearing a lifejacket** but was conscious when he surfaced. The operator threw a Type IV throwable PFD to the victim but the victim did not reach for the device and then went face down in the water. The operator jumped in the water to assist but was unable to keep the victim from sinking. The victim's body was recovered by a DCNR Ranger approximately 20 minutes after the incident. Lifesaving efforts were unsuccessful and the victim was pronounced dead at the hospital. The operator of the boat was an experienced boater but **had no formal boating safety education**. It is not known if the victim was able to swim. **The victim's health and physical condition may have been factors.**

10. 1 Fatality Canoe Creek Lake Blair County
6/14/11 7:38 a.m. Tuesday

A **71-year-old man** lost his life when he apparently fell overboard from his **11-foot aluminum open motorboat**. Evidence indicated that the victim fell overboard and attempted to get back in the boat but was unsuccessful. He was found approximately 100 yards from the boat with one arm in a Type III PFD. The lifejacket was buckled so it is likely that the victim **was not wearing a lifejacket** when the accident occurred. The victim was known to not wear a lifejacket when boating. It is unknown if the victim could swim. The cause of death has been ruled an accidental drowning. **The victim's health and physical condition may have been factors.** The victim was an experienced boater but it is not known if the victim had any formal boating safety education.

11. 1 Fatality Susquehanna River Dauphin County
6/15/11 4:12 p.m. Wednesday

A **41-year-old man** lost his life when his **9.5-foot kayak** went over the Dock Street Dam and capsized. A witness observed the victim paddling across the current when he was swept over the dam in his kayak. The victim was considered a very inexperienced paddler and had purchased the kayak only a few days before the incident. The victim **was not wearing a life jacket**, although one was found in the boil of the dam along with an inflatable air bladder. **The victim had not taken a formal boating safety education course.** The victim could swim. The victim's body was recovered the same day, approximately ½ mile downstream of the dam.

12. 1 Fatality Youghiogheny River Lake Somerset County
7/2/11 2:15 p.m. Saturday

A **50-year-old man** lost his life when the **34-foot catamaran** he was operating at high speed capsized. The customized speedboat was travelling at a high rate of speed on choppy water when the operator lost control. The vessel capsized and all four persons onboard were violently ejected. The passengers were rescued by boaters who witnessed the accident. The victim had been boating for fifteen years and on this body of water for the past four years so he was a very experienced boater but had **no formal boating safety education**. There were lifejackets onboard however they **were not worn by the victim or passengers**. The victim could swim. **Alcohol may have been a factor.** The victim's body was recovered by divers in 110 feet of water near the accident site four days later.

13. 1 Fatality Susquehanna River Bradford County
7/9/11 12:30 p.m. Saturday

A **47-year-old man** lost his life when his **12-foot open motorboat** went through a sweeper (over hanging tree branch). The victim and a passenger were in the boat when it drifted into strong current and they got swept off their boat by an overhanging tree along the shoreline of an island. The victim and passenger both clung to a tree branch. Eventually, the passenger was unable to hold onto the tree any longer. He broke free from the tree and was washed into shallow water on the opposite shoreline downstream. The victim, who remained trapped, continued to struggle and call for help. The victim then went under water. His body and boat were found trapped under the surface by a strainer. **There were two lifejackets on board but they were not worn.** The victim was an **average swimmer** had been boating since he was a child so he was a very experienced boater but had **no formal boating safety education.**

14. 1 Fatality Susquehanna River Lancaster County
7/18/11 Unknown Monday

A **61-year-old man** lost his life while boating on his **16-foot open motorboat.** The victim's body was found in shallow water by local fire personnel and police with the boat nearby. **The victim was wearing a lifejacket.** The victim drowned but health or heat related issues may have contributed to the fatality. It is unknown if the victim could swim. The victim was an experienced boater but did not have **any formal boating safety education.**

15. 1 Fatality Lake Erie Erie County
7/27/11 6:15 p.m. Wednesday

A **27-year-old man** lost his life when he drowned while **swimming** from a **27-foot sailboat.** The victim was onboard the sailboat while it was adrift and decided to take a swim. After about a minute the victim became labored and distressed. A passenger onboard the sailboat threw a Type III PFD to the victim who was unable to recover it. The passenger then entered the water to assist the distressed victim but was unable to recover him due to the victim going beneath the surface of the water. Emergency personnel were able to recover the body via side scan sonar approximately 6 hours later. All required safety equipment was onboard the boat at the time of the incident, however the victim **was not wearing a lifejacket** at the time of the incident. The victim's swimming skills are unknown. The operator of the boat was an experienced boater and had taken a **formal boating safety course.**

16. 1 Fatality Mauch Chunk Lake Carbon County
7/30/11 1:10 p.m. Saturday

An **88-year-old angler** was fishing from his **9-foot open motorboat** when it capsized. Commission Waterways Conservation Officers arrived at the location of the capsized boat and found the angler unconscious. Officers retrieved the angler from the water and performed CPR. The victim was transported via patrol boat to EMS staff on shore then air-lifted to the hospital where he was pronounced dead. The small boat was unstable due to its unique size and shape. The boat was equipped with life jackets however the **victim was not wearing one.** The victim's health and physical condition may have been factors. It is unknown if the victim could swim. The victim was an experienced boater but did not have **any formal boating safety education.**

17. 1 Fatality Raystown Lake Huntingdon County
7/31/11 7:30 a.m. Sunday

A **54-year-old angler** and a passenger were fishing from his **19-foot open motorboat** when he suddenly fell overboard. The victim did not surface and repeated attempts by the passenger and nearby boaters did not produce the victim. The victim's body was recovered by a dive unit 3 hours later. The boat was **equipped**

with lifejackets however no one onboard was wearing one. The victim's health and physical condition may have been a factor. It is unknown if the victim could swim. The boat operator was an experienced boater but it is **unknown if the victim had any formal boating safety education.**

18. 1 Fatality Lehigh River Lehigh County
8/7/11 4:30 p.m. Sunday

A **34-year-old male** drowned when his **kayak** capsized. The victim was paddling downstream with three other kayakers when he capsized. His fellow kayakers saw he was in distress and eventually reached him and brought him to shore. An ambulance transported him to a local hospital where he died one hour later. PA State Police ruled it an accidental death. The cause of death was drowning and toxicology reports are pending. The investigation is ongoing.

19. 1 Fatality Delaware River Philadelphia County
8/13/11 10:15 p.m. Saturday

A **45-year-old male** lost his life after entering the water from an **18-foot open motorboat** to swim. The victim and four others had been at anchor on the river while listening to a concert. They later were underway when, at some point, three of the passengers entered the water to swim. One of the subjects noticed the victim struggling and observed him going under the water. The victim's body was recovered 6 days later and an autopsy ruled his death a drowning. **Drug/alcohol use** may have been a factor. The investigation is ongoing.

20. 1 Fatality Hemlock Lake Indiana County
8/27/11 4:05pm Saturday

A **63-year-old male** lost his life when he fell from a **12-foot open motorboat**. The victim and his son were fishing and shifted their weight to the same side of the boat to view something in the water. This caused the boat to capsize, ejecting both passengers. The son was able to swim to shore. The father held on to a seat from the boat but the seat was not designed to be a flotation aid. The boat, equipped with an electric motor that was still in gear, returned upright and continued down the lake. The body of the victim was recovered the next morning. All required safety equipment was onboard the boat at the time of the incident, however the victim **was not wearing a lifejacket** at the time of the incident. The victim's swimming skills are unknown. The victim was an experienced boater, but **the victim had no formal boating safety education.** The victim's health and physical condition may have been factors.

21. 1 Fatality Pinchot Lake York County
8/27/11 9:00 a.m. Saturday

A **61-year-old male** lost his life when his **26-foot rowing scull** capsized. Witnesses report that the victim yelled for help and was unable to free himself from the scull. The victim was underwater for approximately 5 minutes before other boaters were able to pull him into a fishing boat and take him to shore. The victim had suffered a massive heart attack. He was admitted to the hospital and in critical condition for three days before being removed from life support and pronounced dead. The victim **was not wearing a lifejacket** and there were **no lifejackets onboard**. Life jacket use was not a factor in the victim's demise. It is unknown if the victim could swim. The victim was an experienced boater but it is **unknown if he had any formal boating safety education.**

22. 1 Fatality Lake Marburg York County
9/2/11 6:30 p.m. Friday

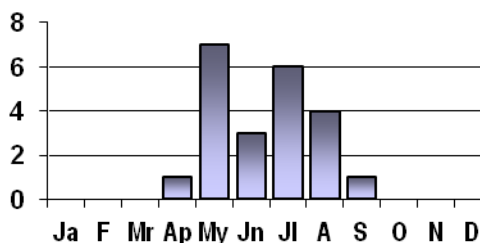
A **64-year-old male** lost his life when he fell overboard from his **22-foot pontoon boat**. There was a report of an intoxicated boat operator out on the lake and officers responded. When officers were searching for the

boat they found it in a boat slip with the motor still running and the navigation lights on. The victim was found floating face down in the water near his boat. The victim **was not wearing a lifejacket** but there were **lifejackets onboard**. The victim's swimming skills are unknown. The victim was an experienced boater, but **the victim had no formal boating safety education**. **Alcohol use was a factor** and the victim's health and physical condition may have also been factors.

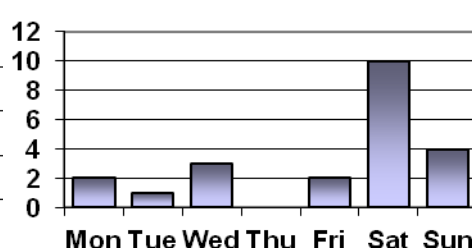
TOTALS FOR 2011: There were 86 reportable recreational boating accidents, 57 injuries requiring medical treatment, and 22 accidents resulting in 22 fatalities.

		FATAL ACCIDENTS	FATALITIES
LOCATION	Rivers	11	11
	Lakes	11	11
TYPE OF BOAT (Carrying victim)	Open motorboat	8	8
	Kayak	5	5
	Canoe	2	2
	Pontoon boat	2	2
	Auxiliary sailboat	1	1
	Inflatable raft	1	1
	Cabin motorboat	1	1
	Catamaran	1	1
	Rowing scull	1	1
TYPE OF ACCIDENT	Fall overboard	9	9
	Capsized	8	8
	Person leaves vessel	2	2
	Fire/Explosion	1	1
	Ejected from vessel	1	1
	Flooding/Swamping	1	1
LIFE JACKETS	Worn	3	3
	None/Insufficient units onboard	2	2
	Aboard but not worn	16	16
	Not a factor	1	1
HYPOTHERMIA OR COLD WATER SHOCK (Possible factor)		7	7
ALCOHOL (Any proven use regardless of BAC)		3	3

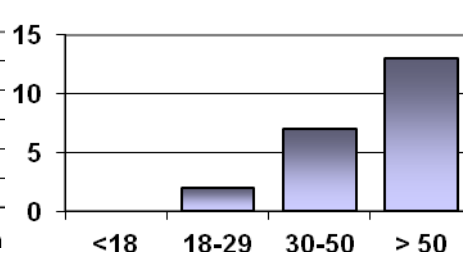
FATALITIES by MONTH



FATALITIES by DAY



FATALITIES by AGE



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON VICTIMS OR BOAT OPERATOR(S):

Swimming ability (victim):	Swimmer	4	Not a factor	1	Unknown	17
Boating education (operator):	Took Course	1	None	16	Unknown	5
Boating experience (operator):	Experienced	16	Inexperienced	2	Unknown	4

COLD WEATHER DATA

The chart below shows the number of accident over the past ten years is much greater from April thru August; however the percentage of accident resulting in fatalities is higher from November thru April due to cold water temperatures resulting in cold water shock to victims of accidents.

