

2006 PENNSYLVANIA BOATING ACCIDENT ANALYSIS

By Dan Martin, Boating Safety Education Manager

The total number of reported recreational boating accidents in Pennsylvania declined slightly in 2006. Boaters and officers reported only 66 recreational boating accidents of all types, a decrease of six accidents from 2005. The number of vessels involved in reported accidents totaled 77, an incredibly low total. Pennsylvania boaters reported 65 injuries requiring medical treatment, the same number as in 2005. Property damage to vessels totaled \$137,438, less than half of what was reported last year. Most accidents with property damage or minor injuries are not reported.

The numbers of Pennsylvanians plying the waterways in 2006 may have decreased from previous years. Gasoline prices were at record highs, the number of currently registered boats decreased, and the weather for boating in two of the three summer months was far from ideal. For example, in June at Harrisburg there were 13 days that had measurable rainfall, nearly 5 inches more than normal. July also had 13 days with rain, with total rainfall 2 inches more than normal. In contrast, August had only four days with measurable rainfall. Weather dramatically affects participation in boating, and it is a factor that cannot be ignored when comparing statistical safety data from year to year.

Of the 66 reported accidents, 17 were collisions, 10 of which were collisions between vessels. The types of reported accidents were as follows:

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|----|--------------------------------|---|
| Falls overboard | 17 | Skier mishap | 3 |
| Capsizing | 16 | Other | 2 |
| Collision with vessel | 10 | Fall within boat | 2 |
| Collision with fixed object | 6 | Fire/explosion | 2 |
| Swamping/flooding | 4 | Collision with floating object | 1 |
| Hit by propeller | 3 | | |

Personal watercraft (PWC) were involved in eight accidents in 2006, seven fewer than in 2005. Seven of the accidents involving PWCs were collisions, accounting for 41 percent of the total number of collisions for all boats. Eleven injuries were reported in accidents involving PWC. For the second year in a row, PWC operators or passengers were fatally injured (see recap #9). This was a double fatality involving a collision with another boat.

Nineteen fatal recreational boating accidents resulted in 25 fatalities. This is 13 more fatalities than the number that was reported in 2005 and the worst year since 1990. Only four of the 25 victims were wearing personal flotation devices at the time of the mishap that resulted in their

deaths. Two of those victims were killed in one accident by blunt force trauma, so PFD use was not a factor in that accident. Six of the victims had wearable PFDs onboard the boat but did not wear them, and in five fatalities there were no PFDs onboard. In three accidents involving six fatalities, the use of PFDs was not applicable, and in three accidents involving five fatalities insufficient PFDs were onboard. The 25 fatalities in 2006 were nearly double the average for the last 10 years (13.2). Chance is always a factor in the number of recreational boating fatalities, and 2006 was a terrible year.

The attached "Recap of 2006 Pennsylvania Boating Fatalities" illustrates the importance of safe boating practices. It provides a summary of all fatal recreational boating accidents in the Commonwealth last year. The recap's last page details statistical information about 2006's fatal boating accidents. The following are some highlights from that statistical information.

In 2006

- There were more fatalities in any year since 1990 (27 fatalities), the second worst year since 1983 (25 fatalities).
- In accidents in which PFD use was a factor, only two victims were wearing a life jacket. Seventeen of the victims *may* still be with us today if they had worn a PFD at the time of the mishap that resulted in their death.
- Eight of the 25 victims were onboard unpowered boats. Seventeen were onboard powerboats.
- Thirteen fatalities occurred on rivers, seven on lakes, three on Lake Erie, and two on ponds.
- Nine of the victims died when their boats capsized, six fell overboard, and one was in a boat that swamped. Seven died in collisions, and two died when their boat went over a dam.
- Hypothermia or sudden immersion into cold water was a possible factor in seven fatalities.
- Alcohol was a possible contributing factor in 14, one of the worst years ever in Pennsylvania.
- Twenty-three of the 25 victims were male; eight of the victims were anglers; eight were paddling a canoe or kayak or rowing a boat.
- Fourteen of the 25 victims were known to be able to swim.
- Two of the victims were less than 18 years of age; six were older than 50.
- The average age of the victims in 2006 was 38. In 2005 it was also 38.
- Three of the boat operators involved in the fatal accidents had taken a boating course.
- The month of June accounted for seven fatalities; July had six; May followed with three. February, April, August, and September each had two. November had one, and there were no fatalities in January, March, October, and December.
- Fifteen of the fatal accidents happened in the afternoon, four in the morning. Five happened after dark.
- Fatalities occurred on six different weekdays. Saturday had the most with nine. Friday and Sunday followed with five each; three happened on Monday; Thursday had two. Only one occurred on a Tuesday with none on Wednesdays.

The Commission is committed to improving boating safety. Please use the information in this report to teach people how to boat safely and responsibly

RECAP OF 2006 PENNSYLVANIA BOATING FATALITIES

1. 1 Fatality Susquehanna River Columbia County
 2/11/06 1:20 p.m. Saturday

A **30-year-old hunter** lost his life when he **fell overboard** from a borrowed **15-foot open motorboat**. The victim dropped another hunter off at an island and was alone when he somehow ended up in the water. A witness heard someone calling for help and saw the victim in the water. The boat was still under power, turning in circles. The witness called 911 but the victim soon disappeared. **The victim wasn't wearing a life jacket, although the boat was properly equipped with PFDs.** The water temperature was only 35°F, so **cold water shock and/or hypothermia are probable factors.** **The victim could swim but was an inexperienced boater and had no formal instruction in boating safety.** He was wearing hip boots at the time of the accident. The victim's body still has not been found as of the date of this report. This is very unusual.

2. 1 Fatality Lake Chillisquaque Montour County
 2/16/06 4:30 p.m. Thursday

A **19-year-old paddler** lost his life when the **17-foot canoe** he was paddling with two others **capsized**. The two survivors remained with the overturned boat and were rescued. Both men were in the water for at least 30 minutes and were treated for **hypothermia**. The victim tried to swim to shore but did not make it. **There were no PFDs onboard the canoe. Alcohol may have been a factor.** The water temperature was 39° F, so **cold water shock and/or hypothermia were factors.** **All three paddlers were inexperienced and had no known formal instruction in boating safety.** **It is unknown if the victim could swim.** The victim's body was recovered on March 11.

3. 2 Fatalities Monongahela River Fayette County
 4/22/06 6:25 p.m. Saturday

A **40-year-old angler** and a **35-year-old angler** lost their lives when their **16-foot open motorboat capsized** below a lock and dam. A witness said that two men were fishing in a boat some 700 feet inside the restricted zone below a gate. When the gate opened, the boat capsized, putting both men into the water. A worker at the lock saw one of the victims attempting to hold onto the overturned boat. **That victim was wearing a PFD.** The workers at the lock closed the gate and attempted to lower a life ring, but the victim was pulled under in the turbulent water. The boat operator at the time of the accident is unknown. **One victim was wearing a PFD; the other did not. It is unknown if the boat was properly equipped with PFDs. It is unknown if the operator had any boating experience or formal instruction in boating safety. Both victims could swim.** The water was 58°F, so **cold water shock was a probable factor.** One of the victim's body was recovered a week later; the other was not found until August 30.

4. 1 Fatality Lake Ondawa (pond) Bradford County
5/14/06 11:30 a.m. Sunday

A **16-year-old paddler** lost his life when the **15-foot canoe** he was paddling **capsized**. A witness saw the canoe capsize, the victim right it and attempt to reboard. It capsized again and the victim attempted to swim to shore. He began having difficulty and called for help but soon disappeared. The water was only 40°F, so **cold water shock was a factor**. The victim was **not wearing a PFD**. The **boat had only one Type IV throwable PFD onboard**. **The victim was an inexperienced boater and had no formal instruction in boating safety**. **He was an above-average swimmer**. The victim's body was recovered two hours later.

5. 1 Fatality Wallenpaupack Creek Wayne County
5/27/06 3:00 p.m. Saturday

A **48-year-old paddler** lost his life when he **fell overboard** from a **16-foot canoe**. The water was 60°F, so **cold water shock was a probable factor**. It is unknown why the victim fell overboard. No one saw him fall into the water. The family of the deceased said that they did see the victim try to swim over to the canoe to retrieve it. He called out for help and disappeared. **The victim was an inexperienced boater and had no formal instruction in boating safety**. **He was a poor swimmer and was not wearing a PFD**. **The boat had only one Type IV throwable PFD onboard**. **Alcohol use may have been a factor**. His body was recovered the same day.

6. 1 Fatality Ohio River Allegheny County
5/30/06 3:00 p.m. Tuesday

A **38-year-old man** lost his life when he **fell overboard** from a **17-foot open motorboat**. The victim was the operator and was traveling in circles. Both people on board were standing because the boat had no installed seats. They were ejected when the boat struck its own wake. The boat traveled about 40 feet up on the shore. The survivor heard the victim calling to him. He swam to the victim, and when they reached each other they both went under. The victim did not resurface. The boat's kill switch was attached to a PFD under the console. **Neither person on board was wearing a life jacket**, although there were six PFDs onboard. **It is unknown if the boat operator had any boating experience, formal instruction in boating safety, or if he could swim**. **Narcotics were found onboard the boat**. The passenger was treated and released. The victim's body was found four days later.

7. 1 Fatality Pymatuning Lake Crawford County
6/9/06 2:15 p.m. Friday

A **71-year-old angler** lost his life when the **16-foot open motorboat** from which he was fishing **swamped and flooded**. Two men went fishing and noticed water rising above the floor. They started for shore, but water came in faster and the boat capsized. The survivor was rescued by another boater, but the victim was trapped beneath the capsized boat. The victim was soon recovered by emergency response personnel and taken to the hospital, where he was revived. Unfortunately, he died the next day. Later tests of the boat by the investigating officer revealed that the boat was improperly loaded with too much weight in the stern, which caused water to enter through the scuppers, then through an external hatch. **PFDs were worn**. **The victim could not swim**. **It is unknown if the operator had any formal instruction in boating safety, but he was an experienced boater**.

8. 2 Fatalities Neshaminy Creek Bucks County
6/10/06 2:00 a.m. Saturday

A **47-year-old man** and a **28-year-old man** lost their lives when the **24-foot cabin motorboat** in which they were passengers **collided with a fixed object**—a concrete bridge abutment in the dark. The vessel then veered toward shore and ran aground. Blunt force trauma from the impact was responsible for the death of one passenger; the other was thrown overboard and drowned, although blunt force trauma was also a major factor in his death. **Alcohol was a major factor. The operator was a very experienced boater but had no formal instruction in boating safety. PFDs were onboard but not worn, although life jacket use was not a factor in this accident. Both victims could swim, but swimming ability was not a factor in this accident.** One of the victim's body was still in the boat when the vessel was discovered the next morning on shore. The body of the victim that was thrown overboard was recovered four days later. The boat operator was not seriously injured and left the scene of the accident without reporting it.

9. 2 Fatalities Lake Erie (Presque Isle Bay) Erie County
6/16/06 4:00 p.m. Friday

A **19-year-old man** and a **21-year-old woman** lost their lives when their **10-foot personal watercraft** collided with a **38-foot cabin motorboat**. The victims were the operator and passenger on the personal watercraft. After the collision the victims were picked up immediately and taken to shore where EMS was waiting. They apparently died at impact or soon thereafter. No one was injured on the cabin motorboat. The victims **were wearing PFDs**, but life jacket use was not a factor in this accident. It is **unknown if the victims could swim**, although swimming ability was not a factor. The **operator of the personal watercraft had taken a boating course, but it is unknown how much boating experience he had. The operator of the cabin motorboat was an experienced boater but had no formal instruction in boating safety.**

10. 1 Fatality Lake Harmony Carbon County
6/23/06 11:00 p.m. Friday

A **64-year-old man** lost his life when he **fell overboard** from his **20-foot pontoon boat**. A couple left a bar and the operator took his new pontoon boat out onto this small lake. His dog had been left onboard while he was in the bar and had had an "accident." The operator decided to clean the dog waste off the bow of the pontoon boat. While the boat was still in gear and moving, he went forward and dipped a bucket into the water. After taking a bucket or two of water, he fell overboard between the pontoons. The passenger onboard attempted unsuccessfully to stop the boat. She then dived into the water and tried to do a swimming rescue but was unsuccessful. She then called for help. Bystanders rescued the passenger, took her to shore, and then went back out on the lake and secured the unattended, but still operating, pontoon boat. The victim had disappeared. **There were PFDs onboard but not worn; they were still encased in plastic. Alcohol was a factor. The victim could not swim. He was an experienced boater but had no formal instruction in boating safety.** The body was recovered the next day by Commission officers and local emergency response teams.

11. 1 Fatality Farm Pond Mercer County
6/26/06 9:30 p.m. Monday

A **51-year-old angler** lost his life when he **capsized** a **12-foot rowboat** on a farm pond. The man was fishing on the pond at night when for some unknown reason he capsized the boat in 4½ feet of water approximately 150 feet from shore. He was last seen standing in the boat. A short time later a witness heard calls for help. He ran down to the lake and saw the victim bobbing up and down in the water. He called to the victim to swim to shore and returned to the residence to get help because he could not swim. Another person at the residence was awakened and ran to the water. Because of darkness he could not see the victim. With good intentions he entered the water and tried to locate the victim but got into trouble and had to return to shore. **The victim could not swim** and there were **no PFDs onboard** the boat. **Alcohol was a major factor in this accident**, and the victim was in very poor physical condition. **The victim was an experienced boater but had no formal instruction in boating safety.** Emergency response was called and his body was recovered quickly.

12. 2 Fatalities Allegheny River Allegheny County
7/1/06 8:04 p.m. Saturday

A **42-year-old man** (the boat operator) and a **19-year-old woman** lost their lives when their **21-foot cabin motorboat** went over the dam at Lock #2. The male victim was recovered floating face-down by Commission waterways conservation officers a few minutes after the accident. With great difficulty he was placed onboard a fire rescue boat that responded to the accident. He later went into cardiac arrest. A witness stated that the operator was operating too fast and would not slow down. The next thing she knew they were airborne as the boat went over the dam at a high rate of speed. She began handing out PFDs to the other women on the boat. **There were not enough PFDs to go around** for the eight people on board the boat. The boat then capsized. Another witness stated she read a sign “Restricted, Boats Keep Out” just before they became airborne. **The operator was an experienced boater but it is unknown if he had any formal instruction in boating safety. It is unknown if the operator could swim. The female victim was an average swimmer**, which probably would not help her in the hydraulic below this dam. **Alcohol was a factor.** The female victim’s body was recovered on July 4 a half-mile downstream.

13. 2 Fatalities Union City Reservoir Erie County
7/3/06 6:00 p.m. Monday

A **22-year-old angler** and his **14-year-old brother** lost their lives when the **14-foot canoe** in which they were fishing **capsized**. A man went fishing with his two sons in the small canoe that capsized about 15 yards from shore. An shoreline angler saw the capsized canoe and heard cries for help. He entered the water and was able to right the canoe. He grabbed one of the victims and pulled him to shore. At this time two other anglers arrived to offer assistance. The rescued victim was not breathing. 911 was called and CPR started. One of the other victims was then seen pulling himself up onto the canoe to grab a life jacket. He did not secure it and re-entered the water, disappearing beneath the surface. The surviving angler was taken to the hospital in **occupants and neither unit was worn. Neither victim could swim. The operator had very little boating experience and no formal instruction in boating safety.** Both victims were recovered the same day in 5 to 6 feet of water.

18. 2 Fatalities
9/24/06

Ohio River
9:30 p.m.

Beaver County
Sunday

A **41-year-old man** (the boat operator) and a **48-year-old man** lost their lives when their **25-foot cabin motorboat** collided with the #4 lock gate at the Montgomery Dam. **Alcohol was a factor.** A passenger onboard the boat survived with minor injuries. **The operator was an experienced boater and had taken a Commission boating course. Neither victim was wearing a PFD, although the boat was properly equipped.** PFD use was not a factor in this accident. **Both victims could swim, although swimming ability was not a factor.** Both victims' bodies were still in the boat when recovered.

19. 1 Fatality
11/24/06

Clairton Lake
2:35 p.m.

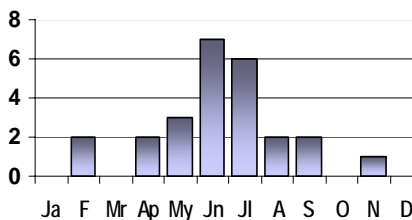
Somerset County
Friday

A **52-year-old angler** lost his life when his **14-foot canoe** from which he was fishing **capsized.** Two men were fishing from the small canoe when the operator dipped his paddle in the water, causing the canoe to capsize suddenly. The operator tried to tow the victim to shore, but when the victim panicked, the would-be rescuer lost his grip and the victim went underwater. The survivor was treated for hypothermia and released. The water temperature was only 45°F, so **cold water shock and hypothermia were probable factors. There were no PFDs onboard the canoe. Alcohol was a factor. The victim could not swim. The surviving paddler was a very experienced boater. It is unknown if he had any formal instruction in boating safety.** The victim's body was recovered by a dive team late the same day.

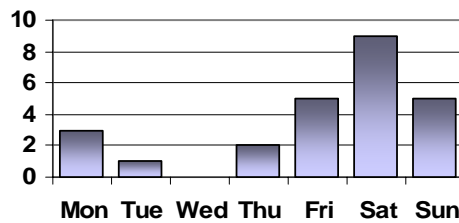
TOTALS FOR 2006: There were 66 reportable recreational boating accidents in 2006, 65 injuries requiring medical treatment, and 19 recreational fatal accidents resulting in 25 fatalities.

| | | ACCIDENTS | FATALITIES |
|---|-----------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| LOCATION: | Rivers | 9 | 13 |
| | Lakes | 6 | 7 |
| | Ponds | 2 | 2 |
| | Lake Erie | 2 | 3 |
| TYPE OF BOAT: <i>(Carrying victim)</i> | Open motorboat | 7 | 8 |
| | Canoe | 5 | 6 |
| | Cabin motorboat | 3 | 6 |
| | PWC | 1 | 2 |
| | Pontoon | 1 | 1 |
| | Kayak | 1 | 1 |
| | Rowboat | 1 | 1 |
| TYPE OF ACCIDENT: | Capsizing | 7 | 9 |
| | Fall overboard | 6 | 6 |
| | Collision with fixed object | 2 | 4 |
| | Collision with vessel | 2 | 3 |
| | Boat over dam | 1 | 2 |
| | Swamping/flooding | 1 | 1 |
| PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICE: | Aboard but not worn | | 6 |
| | Not applicable | | 6 |
| | None onboard | | 5 |
| | Insufficient number onboard | | 5 |
| | Worn | | 2 |
| | Unknown | | 1 |
| HYPOTHERMIA OR SUDDEN IMMERSION: <i>(Possible factor)</i> | | 6 | 7 |
| ALCOHOL: <i>(any proven use regardless of BAC)</i> | | 11 | 14 |

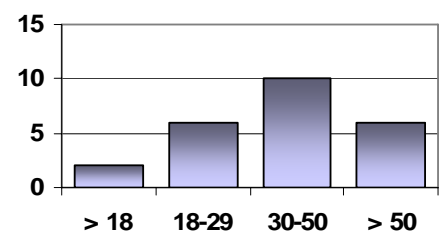
FATALITIES by MONTH



FATALITIES by DAY



FATALITIES by AGE



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON VICTIMS OR BOAT OPERATOR(S):

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------|
| Swimming ability (victim): | Swimmer 10 | Poor Swimmer 4 | Nonswimmer 6 | Unknown 5 |
| Boating education (operator): | Took Course 3 | None 12 | Unknown 4 | |
| Boating experience (operator): | Experienced 11 | Inexperienced 5 | Unknown 3 | |