

2023 PENNSYLVANIA BOATING INCIDENT ANALYSIS

By Ryan C. Walt – Boating Incident Review Officer

Federal and state law requires that recreational boating incidents involving death or disappearance, injuries requiring medical treatment beyond first aid, and/or property damage exceeding \$2,000 be reported to the state. In 2023, Pennsylvania boaters and Waterways Conservation Officers reported 48 recreational boating incidents meeting these criteria. This represents an increase of seven (15%) over 2022. The number of vessels involved in reported incidents totaled 59, an increase of 11 from 2022. Incident reports indicated 41 injuries requiring medical treatment which was 11 more than in 2022. Property damage to vessels totaled \$208,599 which was \$119,849 more than the amount reported in the previous year. One incident comprised \$80,000 or 38% of that total.

Consistently from year to year, the most common types of incidents are collisions with vessels and capsizing. The types of reported incidents in 2023 were as follows:

Type	Quantity	Type	Quantity
Capsizing	12	Fall in boat	4
Collision with vessel	9	Falls overboard	2
Struck submerged/ fixed/floating object	7	Grounding	2
Skier Mishap	6	Sinking	1
Person ejected from vessel	4	Fire/explosion	1
TOTAL 48			

In 2023, seven recreational boating incidents resulted in eight fatalities. This is a decrease of one fatality from the previous year and brings the new 10-year average to 10.6 deaths, the lowest on record. Nearly all recreational boating deaths could be prevented through life jacket wear, however only one of the eight victims in 2023 was wearing a life jacket at the time of the mishap that resulted in death.

The following “Recap of 2023 Pennsylvania Boating Fatalities” includes summaries of each fatal incident as well as statistical information about the total fatal boating incidents. This recap is intended to provide information to illustrate the importance of safe boating practices and to help improve boating safety in the Commonwealth.

RECAP OF 2023 PENNSYLVANIA BOATING FATALITIES

1. 1 Fatality Lake Henry Wayne County
3/18/2023 1:45 A.M. Saturday

An 18-year-old male is deceased after the 10-foot rowboat he was operating capsized in 37-degree water. The victim and two others launched the boat without any life jackets onboard and none were worn. The boat began taking on water and capsized, leaving all three individuals in the water. After failed attempts to upright the boat, two of the individuals held on to the boat and noticed the victim was face down in the water. The local fire department rescued the two individuals, and the victim was recovered a few hours later. The victim did not have any formal boating safety education. Sudden coldwater immersion and alcohol use may have been factors.

2. 1 Fatality Susquehanna River Dauphin County
4/13/2023 7:16 A.M. Thursday

A 65-year-old male is deceased after the 12-foot open motorboat he was operating went over the Dock Street Dam. The boat had drifted too close to the dam after the engine stalled. It went over the dam and capsized. The passenger was wearing a life jacket and was rescued by another boater who happened to be in the area. He was transported to the hospital. The victim was wearing a lifejacket when he went over the dam but when recovered approximately six hours later and nearly five miles from the site of the incident, the victim no longer had the lifejacket on. The victim did not have any formal boating safety education. Sudden coldwater immersion may have been a factor.

3. 1 Fatality Wisecarver Reservoir Greene County
5/18/2023 Unknown Thursday

A 65-year-old male is deceased after not returning home from a fishing trip. His 10-foot kayak was found adrift on the lake. After an extensive search, the victim's body was recovered 10 days later. The victim was not wearing a life jacket nor was there one onboard. The operator was an experienced paddler but did not have any formal boating safety education. Sudden coldwater immersion and alcohol use may have been a factor.

4. 1 Fatality Susquehanna River Dauphin County
6/28/2023 3:45 P.M. Wednesday

An 82-year-old male is deceased after capsizing his 12-foot canoe while paddling in high water. The victim was not wearing a lifejacket however there was one onboard. The victim was an experienced paddler but did not have any formal boating safety education.

5. 1 Fatality Dresser Lake Monroe County
8/19/2023 12:33 P.M. Saturday

A 26-year-old male is deceased after capsizing an 8-foot kayak. At some point he ended up in the water and was seen struggling to stay above water. He eventually went under water and did not resurface. The victim's body was recovered approximately three hours later. He was not wearing a life jacket at the time of the incident and had no formal boating safety education. Drugs or alcohol may have been a factor.

6. 2 Fatalities Private Pond Clinton County
8/19/2023 8:56 P.M. Saturday

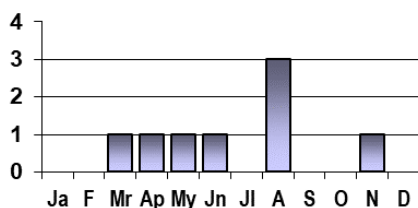
A 41-year-old male and an 11-year-old male are deceased after their 6-foot homemade unpowered boat capsized while fishing. Two other children were onboard at the time of the incident and swam to shore to get help. The victims' bodies were recovered a short time later. The victims were not wearing life jackets and had no formal boating safety.

7. 1 Fatality Mountain Top Lake Monroe County
11/23/2023 2:40 P.M. Thursday

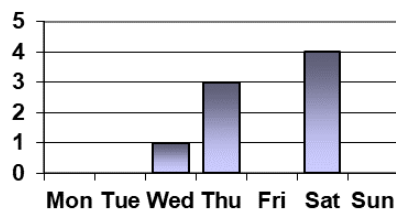
A 31-year-old male is deceased after leaving his kayak to assist another kayaker. The victim and two children were onboard a 13-foot kayak. The victim left his kayak to assist a third child whose 8-foot kayak had capsized. After several attempts to right the third child's kayak, the victim disappeared under water. The three children were all wearing life jackets and made it to shore safely. The victim was not wearing a life jacket and his body was recovered a short time later. The victim was reported to be a good swimmer and had previous kayak experience. Sudden coldwater immersion may have been a factor.

		FATAL INCIDENTS	FATALITIES
LOCATION	Rivers	2	2
	Lakes	5	6
TYPE OF BOAT (Carrying victim)	Motorboat	1	1
	Paddlecraft	6	7
TYPE OF INCIDENT	Falls overboard	4	4
	Capsizing	3	3
	Person leaves vessel	1	1
	Unknown	1	1
LIFE JACKETS	Worn	1	1
	None/Insufficient	5	5
	Onboard but not worn	2	2
HYPOTHERMIA OR COLDWATER SHOCK (Possible factor)		4	4
DRUGS/ALCOHOL (Any proven use regardless of BAC)		3	3

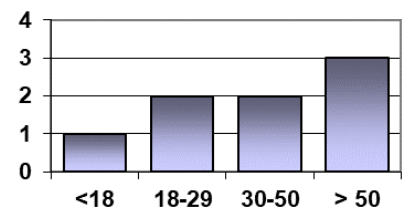
FATALITIES by MONTH



FATALITIES by DAY



FATALITIES by AGE



COLD WEATHER DATA

The first chart below shows the number of incidents and percentage of incidents resulting in fatalities from 2002 to 2011. The percentage of incidents resulting in fatalities was higher from November through April due to colder water temperatures resulting in coldwater shock to victims who ended up in the water as a result of the mishap. In 2012, a new regulation went into effect that required all boaters on boats less than 16 feet in length or any canoe or kayak to wear a life jacket from November 1st to April 30th of each year. The second chart below shows the same statistics from 2012 to present, to show the impact of the regulation change.

