

2003 Pennsylvania Boating Fatalities

by Dan Martin

In 2003, nine fatal recreational boating accidents resulted in 11 fatalities.

This information reviews last year's Commonwealth fatal recreational boating accidents.

It illustrates the importance of safe boating practices.



**BOAT SMART.
BOAT SAFE.
WEAR IT!**

1. ONE FATALITY

Youghiogheny River, Fayette Co.
Sat. 3/15/03, 1:00 p.m.

A 19-year-old paddler died when he became separated from the 7-foot kayak he was paddling. The type of accident is unknown. The victim launched his boat into the high, swift river waters. The victim was wearing a properly fitted PFD and a wet suit. However, the water temperature was 41 degrees. Hypothermia or sudden immersion into cold water were probable factors. The victim was a good swimmer and a very experienced boater, having served as a river guide on the Youghiogheny for one of the outfitters. It is unknown if he had any formal instruction in boating safety.

2. ONE FATALITY

Canoe Lake, Blair Co.
Sat. 4/12/03, 11:31 a.m.

A 44-year-old angler lost his life when the 10-foot open motorboat in which he was a passenger swamped and flooded. The two brothers went fishing in the small boat on the first day of trout season. Witnesses stated that the boat had only two or three inches of freeboard. As the victim retrieved the anchor, he flooded the boat. Both men then fell into the lake's cold waters. The surviving angler apparently partially donned a type III PFD. The victim was not wearing a life jacket. The water temperature was 48 degrees, so hypothermia or sudden immersion into cold water were probable factors. Neither boater had any formal instruction in boating safety. The operator was an inexperienced

small-craft operator. Ironically, the anglers had been warned earlier in the day by Commission deputy waterways conservation officers to stay off the water because the boat would be overloaded if they both went fishing.

3. ONE FATALITY

Pecks Pond, Pike Co.
Mon. 6/16/03, 6:00 a.m.

A 25-year-old man lost his life when he apparently fell overboard from a 10-foot rowboat. Two cousins took a boat from a rental business at about 3 a.m. They rowed the boat to an island and drank whiskey. The victim passed out or fell asleep. The survivor rowed the boat to shore, deployed a small anchor and went to get breakfast. When he returned to the boat, his cousin was missing. PFDs were on board but not worn. Alcohol and sudden immersion were major factors in this accident. The water temperature was 60 degrees. The victim was an inexperienced boater and had no formal instruction in boating safety. He was an average swimmer.

4. TWO FATALITIES

French Creek, Venango Co.
Wed. 6/18/03, 3:00 p.m.

Two 12-year-old girls lost their lives when their 16-foot rented canoe capsized and was pinned against a strainer. There were three girls in the canoe as part of a church-sponsored float trip. The survivor flushed through and was rescued from an island downstream. Both victims were wearing life jackets, though a type II came off of one of the victims. Both victims could swim. They had no formal instruction in boat-

ing safety other than the pre-trip orientation presented by the livery operator immediately before the float trip. Though the water was still only 61 degrees, hypothermia and sudden immersion were not factors in this accident.

5. ONE FATALITY

**Delaware River, Pike Co.
Fri. 7/4/03, 11:30 a.m.**

A 48-year-old man lost his life when his 16-foot rented canoe capsized in the Shohola Rapids. The victim was paddling with his wife. They had rented the boat in their home state of New York and launched it earlier in the day on the Pennsylvania side of the river. The surviving paddler wore a PFD; unfortunately, the victim did not. There was a PFD on board for the victim and he had been instructed to wear it by the boat livery. The victim could swim and may have hit his head on a rock when the canoe capsized. Though the victim was an experienced boater, he had no formal instruction in boating safety.

6. ONE FATALITY

**Youghiogheny River, Fayette Co.
Sat. 7/5/03, 2:30 p.m.**

A 46-year-old man lost his life when the 12-foot rubber raft he was paddling as part of a group capsized at Dimple Rock in Swimmers Rapid. After capsizing, the victim was carried by the current into Swimmers Rapid. The victim was wearing a PFD and a helmet. Though the trip was guided, the guide was not in the boat. The victim was an inexperienced boater, but it is unknown if he had any formal instruction in boating safety. He was a below-average swimmer.

7. ONE FATALITY

**Private Pond, Allegheny Co.,
Sat. 7/26/03, 5:45 p.m.**

A 43-year-old man lost his life when the 14-foot canoe he was paddling swamped in a private pond. The victim was with two other people at a private pond and took a nearby canoe out onto

the water. The pond was about 100 yards across. When the victim reached the middle of the pond, the canoe began to flood. He jumped into the water and began to swim to shore. Alcohol use was a major factor in this accident. There were no PFDs on board the canoe. The victim's swimming ability is unknown, though it is probable that the victim was a poor swimmer. It is also unknown if the victim had any boating experience or formal instruction in boating safety.

8. ONE FATALITY

**Shenango River, Lawrence Co.
Tues. 12/23/03, 9:30 p.m.**

A 55-year-old man lost his life when his 13-foot canoe capsized. It was after dark when the victim and another man launched their canoe to hunt raccoons. There were no PFDs on board the canoe. They shot several raccoons and were attempting to retrieve one from a logjam when their boat hit a submerged object and capsized. The survivor struggled but made it to the bank. The water temperature was 36 degrees, so hypothermia or sudden immersion into cold water were possible factors. The victim was a better-than-average swimmer. He was also an experienced boater and had taken a Commission boating course.

9. TWO FATALITIES

**Lake Nockamixon, Bucks Co.,
Tues. 12/30/03, time unknown**

A 25-year-old man and a 19-year-old man lost their lives when their 15-foot canoe apparently capsized. The two men were duck hunting on the lake. It is probable that the victims capsized the canoe, possibly while attempting to retrieve a duck. No PFDs were on board. Though the cause of the accident is unknown, both men were very inexperienced paddlers and had no formal instruction in boating safety. The canoe had been purchased the day before the accident. Though both victims could swim, hypothermia or sudden immersion into cold water were possible factors. ☐

Dan Martin is the Commission's Boating Safety Education Manager.

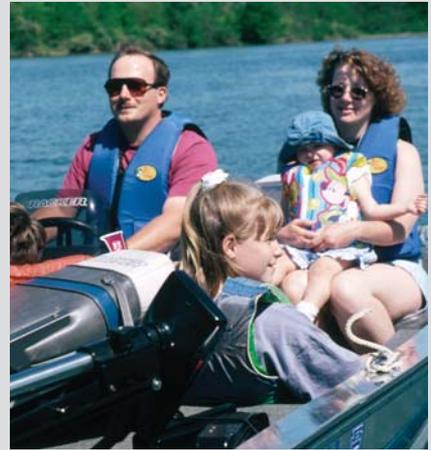


photo-Dan Martin

Wearing a properly fitted zipped and buckled life jacket can save your life in an emergency. Be sure all aboard your boat also wear their life jackets.



This article summarizes the report "2003 Pennsylvania Boating Accident Analysis." View, download or print the complete report on the Commission's web site, www.fish.state.pa.us. On the main page's left side under "Navigate Our Site," click on "Boating" and then scroll to the links under "Boat Accidents."

