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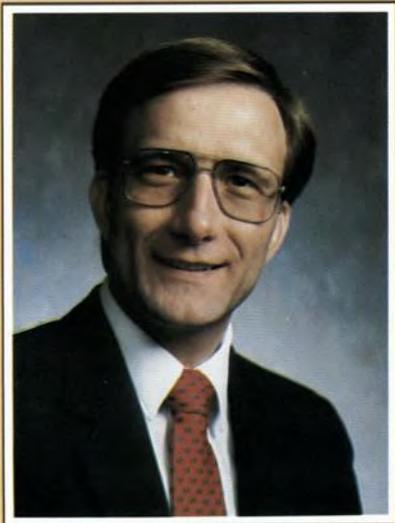


The Keystone State's Official Boating Magazine



Viewpoint

To Wear or not to Wear



John Simmons
Director
Bureau of Boating
Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission

In April, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) released a report on its study of recreational boating safety. This report made several recommendations that could have a lasting effect on the future of recreational boating. How these recommendations will be received in Pennsylvania depends entirely on you.

During its study, the NTSB reviewed U.S. Coast Guard data on recreational boating accidents from 1986 to 1991. In addition, 18 states including Pennsylvania were asked to provide copies of accident investigation reports for all of their fatal boating accidents for 1991. Of the 924 fatalities that occurred nationally, the NTSB studied 407. From its analysis, the Board concluded that a number of efforts to address the causes of fatal boating accidents should be initiated.

Alcohol was found to be a factor in at least 37 percent of fatal boating accidents. As a result, the Board called for chemical testing of all operators involved in boating accidents, clear definitions of legal impairment, and increased enforcement of these alcohol abuse laws. Pennsylvania, which already has a strong alcohol law, was targeted for improvements in measurement and detection of alcohol use and stronger enforcement of current laws.

Another major area identified by the Board for improvement was efforts to increase the number of boat operators attending boating safety classes. The Board found that unlike general aviation and motor vehicle operations, an operator of a recreational boat is not required to demonstrate an understanding of the rules of the road and an ability to operate the boat. Consequently, it has been recommended that all boat operators take, as a minimum, a boating safety class, and preferably, that the licensing of all boat operators be required.

The Commission has been a strong proponent of voluntary boat safety education and has made a tremendous effort to make these classes available and convenient for all boaters. Unfortunately, the number of students still remains terribly low. It has been estimated that over two million people boat each year in Pennsylvania, yet last year less than 10,000 people took advantage of the many classes offered in the state. The Commission has not actively pursued a mandatory education requirement, but unless boaters begin to see the need to become versed in the boating rules and regulations, the possibility for a mandatory requirement remains high.

The third major recommendation was that boaters be required to wear personal flotation devices. It is an easily obtained statistic that most people who drown in boating accidents were not wearing a PFD. The obvious solution to this is to require everyone to wear one at all times. It has been the Commission's position that wearing a PFD is often the prudent thing to do. We have always stressed the need to wear a PFD in small boats, in canoes, on rough or cold water or when the weather threatens. Unfortunately, many people don't always recognize prudence, opting instead for machismo and a tan. Sudden immersion during a capsize and falls overboard—the most common causes of fatalities in Pennsylvania—

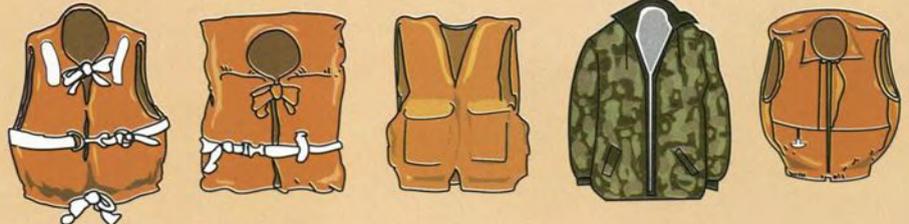


We see parents who won't wear one themselves. Often this results when, after an accident, the child a PFD but the parent died because he insisted that their kids wear a PFD but is just plain stupid and we see the

In an effort to curb the number of drowning fatalities, the Pittsburgh District of the Army Corps of Engineers now requires all boaters in boats less than 16 feet to wear a PFD at all times. We believe that this is an extreme reaction, but we also understand the frustration of the managers as they try to ensure the safety of users of their waterways when those users won't cooperate with voluntary compliance with established safety practices.

The chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board has written to Governor Casey outlining its recommendations. The Commission will consider and respond to the recommendations and either take action or propose alternative compliance measures. If the boaters of Pennsylvania do not want to be required to wear PFDs, to attend mandatory boating safety courses or to obtain a license to enjoy their sport, they must improve their voluntary compliance with safety measures that are known to be life savers.

Take a boating class and use your PFD. The life you save may be your own. Copies of the NTSB study may be purchased from the National Technical Information Service. To purchase this publication, order report number PB93-917001 from: National Technical Information Service, 5285 Port Royal Road, Springfield, VA 22161; (703) 487-4600.



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The covers

This issue's wraparound cover, photographed by Tom King, shows two boaters enjoying pull toys. If you enjoy pull toys or water skiing, the lowdown on pages 25 and 30 will interest you for ideas on where to rev up your motor and enjoy a ride. Paddlers will want to check out the details in the articles on paddling the lower Yough on page 6, the canoe IQ test on page 16, and canoeing basics on page 22. Do you boat with kids—even infants? Please read the vital information beginning on page 4. Whatever kind of powerboat you own, read the money-saving ideas on page 14, and if you're looking for a rig that can operate in literally inches of water, see page 28. Finally, on page 10 you will find everything you need to know about equipping your boat with a cellular phone.

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