

# COUNTY OF OAKLAND OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF

MICHAEL J. BOUCHARD



## **Preparation Makes a Safe Boating Season**

Although the cool weather has held off some water activity on our Oakland County lakes, things are about to heat up! Regardless of what type of vessel you are preparing to launch, your spring start-up preparations will play a large part in how safe and enjoyable your boating season will be. Our Oakland County Marine Unit has been busy with launching patrol boats and conducting dozens of boating safety classes throughout Oakland County. Our "marine awareness, education, followed up with enforcement efforts" has greatly reduced the amount of fatal accidents in Oakland County. However, Oakland County continues to lead the State of Michigan in boating accidents and drownings due to over 70 square miles of water, the most watercrafts in the State and a large population based at or near the waters edge.

We have all heard the stories of one miscalculation or one item that was over-looked on our spring pre-launch checklist. Most stories end with the frustration of an engine that will not run properly or needing a tow off the water or worse, an expensive repair. However, some stories end with tragic results involving injury and even death. The common factor that ties these situations together is that nearly all of them could have been prevented with a pre-launch safety check and a boating safety course. Already this year, we have had boating accidents which caused the occupants to fall over board into the cold water. In both cases the occupants were not wearing a PFD or life vest and nearly drowned. Over 60% of drowning victims never intended to enter the water, but they did unexpectedly, mostly due to falls over board and capsizing. Putting on a PFD during an accident or while in the water is difficult and rarely happens. The capsizing of the Ethan Allen in New York with such a high loss of life is just one recent example.

## **Keys to a Safe Boating Season**

- Take a boating safety class and understand the basic rules of the waterway.
- Make sure everyone on your boat wears a PFD or life vest and remains seated while underway.
- Avoid alcohol consumption on the water and always keep a sharp lookout.
- Always use due care and caution and do not over-drive your vessel.

Over 80% of all accidents and deaths on the water are attributed to reckless operation, alcohol and/or not wearing a life vest.

One major misconception is that "if I can drive a car I can operate a boat or PWC". We are seeing more accidents where owners are allowing untrained operators to drive their boats or PWC's. These vessels require a certain level of skill and training to safely operate them. Unlike a car they do not have brakes, safety belts or airbags. Instinct will tell you to let off the gas when suddenly approaching a hazard (like a car), when you do this with a jet boat or PWC you will lose all steering capability. This misconception can turn a summer day of fun on the water into a tragic accident changing lives forever.

Boating is equipment intensive regardless if you perform routine maintenance or have it done. If you are not qualified to perform repairs or are considering purchasing a used vessel, seek out a qualified marine inspection or mechanic. Many problems are hard to see with the untrained eye. Most fires or explosions on the water are from operators who do not ventilate the engine compartments properly; it is a must to ventilate the engine compartment by opening the "hood". Unlike a car, many engine compartments are sealed. Conduct a thorough check of the engine compartment for any signs of oil, fuel or water leaks. Pay particular attention to fuel odors to avoid boat fires.

### **Who Needs A Boaters Safety Class?**

- Everyone born after Dec. 31<sup>st</sup>, 1978 must have attended a boater's safety class to operate a personal water craft (PWC)
- 12 to 16 year-olds if operating a boat with over 6 horsepower motor
- Everyone will benefit from a boating class

Our Marine Division provides boating classes throughout the county year round and have instructed over 9,000 students last year. You can sign-up for a boating class by calling the Oakland County Marine Division at (248) 391-0256 or visit our web-site at [www.oakgov.com/sheriff/safety\\_tips](http://www.oakgov.com/sheriff/safety_tips) for class locations and dates and vessel safety check locations.

With over 3,000 miles of shoreline and 450 named lakes, Oakland County leads the state with the most registered watercrafts. Enjoy yourself on the water, be respectful of your fellow boaters and above all, have a safe boating season.

Sincerely,



Michael J. Bouchard  
Sheriff, Oakland County

Oakland County Sheriff Michael J. Bouchard and the Oakland County Sheriff's Office Marine Division Patrol Boat Inspections



1200 N TELEGRAPH RD \* PONTIAC MI 48341-1044 \* (248) 858-5000