

NEWS

Oregon State Marine Board

Boat Oregon!



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Operation Dry Water Focuses on Impaired Boat Operators

The Marine Board, law enforcement from 17 county sheriff's offices, and seven Oregon US Coast Guard Stations will be participating in Operation Dry Water during the weekend of July 5-7, as part of a nationally coordinated effort to reduce the number of accidents and fatalities related to Boating Under the Influence of Intoxicants (BUII).



“We’ve had multiple boating fatalities in 2019 where alcohol, marijuana or other drugs may have played a factor,” says Randy Henry, Boating Safety Program Manager for the Marine Board. “It’s tragic and preventable, and we’re doing our best to keep Oregon’s waters safe for families.”

Many marine officers have completed specialized training to recognize alcohol and drug impairment. This includes prescription drugs, alcohol, inhalants, marijuana, or any other substance that impairs a person’s ability to make sound judgments and have the ability to safely operate a boat. The effects of drugs and alcohol are also amplified on the water with the combination of sun glare, wind, waves, and other environmental stressors. Alcohol also dehydrates the body making sudden immersion into cold water at an even greater risk for drowning.

Impaired boaters can expect to be arrested or face serious penalties. In Oregon, the consequences of being convicted of BUII include the possibility of jail time, \$6,250 in fines and loss of boating privileges. Marine officers can arrest boaters on observed impairment and can legally obtain blood, breath or urine if a boater fails field sobriety testing. So far this year, seven people have been arrested for BUII and at least two fatalities appear to have involved alcohol or drugs.

“Overall, recreational boating is very safe if boaters wear life jackets, boat sober, and keep a sharp lookout. Waterways are becoming more crowded with a variety of mixed boating and other activities, so it’s important to pay attention to what’s going on around you and to follow the navigation rules of the road.

If boaters changed two things; wear life jackets and abstain from substances, accidents would be extremely rare,” says Henry. So far this year, the common denominators for accidents include impairment, distracted operation, and no life jacket.

Henry goes on to say, “The public is our ally in safe boating. If you see an impaired operator or someone who is operating in a way that threatens others’ safety, call 911 and report it. That’s how we can work together to save lives.”

For more information about Operation Dry Water, visit www.operationdrywater.org.

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