

The reports are true . . .



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he reports that Florida has the highest number of boating accidents and deaths in the nation are sad, but true. In 2005, there were 80 deaths, up from 66 in 2004.

Who's involved in these accidents? I was surprised to learn that most of the deaths happen to men older than age 36.

We're not just talking about statistics here, folks. All you have to do is listen to one of our law enforcement officers tell how awful an accident can be, how devastating it is to the family left behind, and you'll never take safe boating for granted again.

One particularly terrible story (not one from Florida) comes to mind. Three well-trained and avid adult boaters – none of whom were drinking that beautiful day – experienced a series of unfortunate events that resulted in all three of them being thrown from their 18-foot boat. Powered, maybe even over-powered, by a 200 hp motor, their own boat became a weapon of destruction for these people. Unmanned, it circled them repeatedly, hitting first one and then the others. One person survived, a tangled mass of injuries caused by the propeller. Following 10 weeks of hospitalization and the amputation of one arm and repeated surgeries on one hip and leg, this woman had to deal with life without her husband, who was one of the fatalities, and face the rest of her life in physical, occupational and psychological therapy.

While this is an extreme, it has many characteristics of Florida's accidents. A whopping 79 percent of fatal falls overboard involve a vessel 17 feet or less in length. The weather conditions were not a factor in 69 percent of Florida's fatalities, where calm water was reported. And, here's a statistic you'll want to remember: none of the victims of fatal falls overboard were wearing or using a life jacket.

FWC's boating law administrator, Capt. Richard Moore, tells us that most accidents result from people losing focus, even momentarily, on the path of the boat. Combine that inattention with a habit of not wearing a life jacket, and the result is deadly.

Be careful out there. We'd like to keep you around to enjoy Florida's waters with us for a long time.

Sincerely,



Kenneth D. Haddad
Executive Director
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission