

"You're in



A member of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary talks to a boat owner during a vessel-safety check.

A seaman drowned after being thrown overboard from his privately owned, 14-foot, fiberglass motorboat. Meanwhile, his passenger suffered a dislocated hip. The two were returning at night when they collided with another boat—neither craft was using running lights. Although the seaman had taken formal boating courses, neither he nor his passenger was wearing a flotation device. The seaman also had been drinking before the mishap occurred.

Incidents like this one account for a yearly average of 700 deaths and 7,000 injuries among recreational boaters. Property damage runs into the hundreds of millions of dollars. These numbers explain why the Coast Guard is challenging boat-

ers to a higher level of safety with their “You’re in Command” outreach campaign.

Recreational-boating accidents are particularly tragic because they happen to people and families out for pleasure and relaxation. Nearly all could be prevented with a few simple steps on the part of boat owners and operators. Attitudinal research sponsored by the U.S. Coast Guard Office of Boating Safety confirmed a strong suspicion: Most boaters believe they are safe enough already. They equate boating safety with equipment—like life jackets, fire extinguishers, and radios—and



“You’re in Command”

forget that safety really is a matter of personal behavior.

Meanwhile, congestion on America’s waterways continues to grow. As a result, only one group has the power to make accident rates go down: the boat owners and operators themselves.

The Coast Guard isn’t in this new outreach program alone. Partners include the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, U.S. Power Squadrons, National Safe Boating Council, National Water Safety Congress, and the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators. The campaign asks recreational boat owners and operators to take new steps to ensure their own safety, as well as the safety of passengers and other boaters.

“You’re in Command” focuses on four actions boaters can take:

Get a vessel safety check (VSC). This program provides a bow-to-stern inspection of a boat’s condition and safety equipment. Experienced members of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and U.S. Power Squadrons do the checks, which identify safety issues and violations before they become problems on the water. “You’re in Command” encourages boat owners to seek a VSC once each year.

Take America’s Boating Course (ABC). This new online course is sponsored by the Auxiliary and Power Squadrons and is recognized by the Coast Guard. It makes boating-safety instruction easily accessible to a vast segment of the population that may never invest the time to attend traditional safe-boating classes. “You’re in Com-

mand” promotes boating courses, specifically the convenience of ABC.

Wear your life jacket. Nothing would reduce boating fatalities faster than universal life-jacket wear. Most boaters carry life jackets, but few wear them consistently while underway, despite the fact drowning causes most boating deaths. Through “You’re in Command,” the Coast Guard challenges all boaters to wear life jackets while underway. Officials hope the new styles of compact and inflatable jackets will make this practice much more common.

Never boat under the influence. Boaters must understand that waterborne stressors, such as wind, sun, vibration, and noise, multiply the effects of alcohol and even some prescription medications to dangerous levels. The Coast Guard recommends no alcohol on board and hopes the “You’re in Command” campaign will reduce the instances of under-the-influence boaters on the water.

“You’re in Command” is timely, given the Coast Guard’s new role in homeland security. The equation is simple: The more recreational boaters take responsibility for their own safety, the more time and resources the Coast Guard can devote to protecting our ports and waterways from waterborne threats. Help do your part to reduce accidents and save lives. ■

Provided courtesy U.S. Coast Guard Office of Boating Safety. Go to www.uscgboating.org for a variety of resources, links and free information.—Ed.