

CITY OF SANTA BARBARA WATERFRONT DEPARTMENT

MEMORANDUM

Date: September 16, 2021
To: Harbor Commission
From: Mike Wiltshire, Waterfront Director
Subject: Harbor Operations Report

U.S. COAST GUARD RELEASES 2020 BOATING SAFETY STATISTICS REPORT

The U.S. Coast Guard reports annually on statistical data on boating accidents. The Recreational Boating Statistics Report for 2020 was recently published, and is found online at uscgboating.org/statistics/accident_statistics.php. The report is based on incidents that resulted in at least one of the following criteria: death, disappearance, injury that required medical treatment beyond first aid, damages to the vessel(s), or other property that equaled or exceeded \$2,000, or a loss of vessel.

In total, there were 767 boating fatalities nationwide in 2020, a 25.1% increase from 2019. From 2019 to 2020, the total number of accidents increased 26% (4,168 to 5,265), and the number of non-fatal injured victims increased 24.7% (2,559 to 3,191). There is evidence that boating activity increased significantly during the pandemic from reports of increased boat sales, insurance policies taken out, insurance claims, and calls for towing assistance. With the increased exposure (i.e., more boating hours), there was greater risk of deaths, injuries, and accidents. The Coast Guard is analyzing variables.

Alcohol continued to be the leading known contributing factor in fatal boating accidents in 2020, accounting for over 100 deaths, or 18% of total fatalities. The report also shows that in 2020:

- The fatality rate was 6.5 deaths per 100,000 registered recreational vessels, the highest in the program's recent history. This rate represents a 25% increase from last year's fatality rate of 5.2 deaths per 100,000 registered recreational vessels.
- Property damage totaled about \$62.5 million.
- Operator inattention, operator inexperience, improper lookout, excessive speed, and machinery failure ranked as the top five primary contributing factors in accidents.

Capt. Scott Johnson, chief of the Office of Auxiliary and Boating Safety at Coast Guard Headquarters, reflected on a number of cases where boaters had recently purchased the vessel involved in the incident, but had not taken many of the proper safety precautions before getting underway.

Where the cause of death was known, 75% of fatal boating accident victims drowned. Of those drowning victims with reported life jacket usage, 86% were not wearing a life jacket.

Where boating instruction was known, 77% of deaths occurred on vessels where the operator had not received boating safety instruction. The Coast Guard recommends that all boaters take a boating safety course that meets the National Boating Education Standards prior to getting out on the water.

The most common vessel types involved in reported accidents were open motorboats, personal watercraft, and cabin motorboats. Where vessel type was known, the vessel types with the highest percentage of deaths were open motorboats (50%), kayaks (15%), and pontoons (9%).

The Coast Guard and local law enforcement agencies reminds all boaters to boat responsibly on the water: wear a life jacket, take a boating safety course, attach the engine cut-off switch, get a free vessel safety check, and boat sober.

“The Coast Guard thanks our boating safety partners,” said Johnson, “they continue to demonstrate a committed effort to reduce loss of life, injuries and property damage through education and enforcement.” For more information on boating responsibly, visit <http://www.uscgboating.org>.

HARBOR & SEAFOOD FESTIVAL EVENT CANCELLED

Regretfully, The Waterfront Department has cancelled the upcoming Harbor & Seafood Festival in October due to growing health and safety concerns of the COVID-19 Delta variant. Staff reached out to various vendors in regards to moving forward with the event, and although some were in favor, the majority of the vendors were not comfortable with the increased numbers of infections within Santa Barbara County and, therefore, agreed it was best to postpone it for another year. To put this in perspective, The Waterfront Department would normally have had approximately 30-40 vendors committed for this event at this time but only 3 vendors signed up. Additionally, some of the local restaurants who typically participate in the event were also hesitant. We are hopeful that as conditions improve with COVID we will be able to return to the full suite of great Waterfront events.

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