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– *Another "Boat Responsibly!" Reminder from the United States Coast Guard* –

## **Anglers/Under-trained Boost Accident Data** **Too Many Still Learn Safety at the School of Hard Knocks**

It's a story that is tragically all too familiar: two boating families enjoying a Saturday afternoon on the lake, clear weather, unobstructed views, then suddenly a shattering collision, injured people in the water, a child drowns. How does it happen? And why, with all of our technology, safety equipment, and regulation, does it still happen?

One factor remains the popularity of smaller, motorized water craft. According to the Coast Guard's 2007 accident data, more than 70 percent of all boating accidents and more than 80 percent of all fatalities involved boats less than 26 feet in length. Open motorboats account for the lion's share of those numbers, not only because of their speed but also because they typically have a low profile in the water. This makes them easier to capsizes and harder for other boaters to see.

But there's more to accident risk than the size of the boat. Two types of boaters are proving to be a tough sell on safety: the experienced but under-trained operator, and the operator who sees the boat as an accessory to another sport, such as hunting or fishing. For too many of these, safety is still being learned in the School of Hard Knocks.

Since 2000, half of all boating accidents on average involved boaters with 100 to 500 hours of experience on the water. This is the operator whose familiarity with boating leads to overconfidence. He or she has learned to start, stop, and steer, and navigating an open waterway seems a snap compared to navigating the freeway at rush hour. Unlike a car, however, there are no brakes on a boat, no seat belts, no turn signals. The steering is different, and the rules on the water are different from the rules on the road.

Accidents can result when boat operators fail to respect those differences; when they speed, take risks, and stop being vigilant. And too frequently they do this without the equipment on board -- or the training -- to deal with an emergency. In 2007, operators with no formal training were involved in 75 percent of all fatal boating accidents.

Anglers present a different problem. Although those who fish and those who water ski have similarly high numbers of accidents, the risk for an angler that a boating accident will prove fatal is 10 times that of someone on skis: 30 percent vs. 3 percent.

What accounts for the difference? Probably the environment in which these activities take place. Skiing is done in open water with three people involved: the boat operator, the lookout, and the skier. In open water, additional help for a downed skier can be as close as other boaters or people on or near the shore. Skiing is also more often a warm

weather pursuit - again, raising the probability that other boaters will be nearby to help if needed. Most important, the skier is very likely to be wearing a life jacket.

Contrast this with the angler: possibly alone in a quiet cove, fishing during the “shoulder” seasons when vacationers and crowds of pleasure boaters are absent, and too often without a life jacket. Solitude, heavy clothes, and no life jacket are a deadly combination if a boat capsizes or someone falls overboard, accidents that contributed to more than 60 percent of boating fatalities in 2007.

These two groups – anglers and the experienced but under-trained – remain a major focus of the Coast Guard’s mission to reduce boating accidents and fatalities. America’s waterways are becoming more and more crowded. Even with the high cost of fuel, there are half again more recreational boats registered with the Coast Guard than there were 25 years ago. This is all the more reason for boaters to seek training in boating skills and emergency measures to ensure the safety of everyone on board.

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*The U.S. Coast Guard reminds all boaters to “Boat Responsibly!” For more tips on boating safety, visit [www.USCGboating.org](http://www.USCGboating.org).*