



Short Safety Subject

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www.bragg.army.mil/psbc-bm/PubsAndForms/ShortSafetySubjects.htm

Boat Smart From The Start



Before you know it, summer will be here and everyone will be taking their boats out on the water. There will be all kinds of boats - bass boats, speed boats, sail boats, canoes, kayaks, and jet skis - all have become an increasingly popular recreation activity. Unfortunately, soldiers continue to be hurt and killed in boating accidents caused by collisions, falling overboard, capsizing, swamping, and grounding.

Operating a boat is more complicated than driving a car, so the potential for hazards increase. Victims of most boating accidents drown because they found themselves in the water unprepared. Once in the water, a personal flotation device (PFD) is the boater's first and best line of defense against drowning. Many PFDs tend to be bulky and hot, and are therefore disregarded by the boater who is more interested in their macho image than in their safety.

Wearing a PFD can mean the difference
between rescue and drowning.

Most recreation boat drowning accidents occur close to a shoreline, where other people are available to help. The PFD could keep the boater in a floating position until rescued.

Alcohol is prominent in recreational boating accidents. Operating a boat while intoxicated is illegal and dangerous. Alcohol may affect a person's balance, vision or judgment. This can be especially dangerous when on the water. Alcohol also tends to encourage risk-taking and dulls the recognition of foolish behavior. Mixing alcohol, boats and water is a lethal cocktail. The following is a good example:

A soldier, his fiancé and several other friends were at a lake picnicking and drinking beer. Some played in the water near the shore while others rode across the lake in a 4-man inflatable raft. A group of men rode first, followed by women and children.

Several times during the afternoon, the soldier was asked if he wanted to ride. He declined each time, explaining that he could not swim. The soldier had recently attended a safety briefing that

included the hazards of swimming and drinking and other water safety hazards. He had also completed water safety instruction and had participated in rafting operations during Ranger Camp.

Late in the afternoon, the soldier was asked once again if he wanted to ride in the raft. His fiancé decided to go, so the soldier finally agreed to go along. He, his fiancé, and three other men got into the 4-man raft and paddled across the lake (about 300 meters) to the swimming area and turned around to come back.

They were more than halfway back when they passed three women on air mattresses. Two of the men started flirting and splashing the women, then they started jumping from the raft to the air mattresses.

The soldier became nervous, and his fiancé started trying to paddle toward shore. The raft, however, began to go in a circle because one of the jumpers had returned and was hanging onto the side.

The other jumper then returned and tried to climb into the raft. The raft flipped over, throwing the three remaining passengers - including the soldier and his fiancé - into the water. The soldier grabbed his fiancé, but couldn't hold on. He went under water and didn't resurface. His body was recovered 4 days later.

How did it happen?

When planning their picnic, these soldiers and their friends never gave safety a thought. They spent the afternoon drinking beer, and they had no safety equipment aboard the raft. During the entire afternoon, the whole group went without life jackets, and they continually overloaded the raft. In addition, the horseplay that ended up upsetting the raft led directly to the soldier's death.

After consuming several beers, the soldier let alcohol override his initial good judgment. Since he had paddled that same type of raft in Ranger Camp, he thought he could handle a ride across the lake and back.

How can we prevent it?

Sometimes it seems that it's absolutely impossible to keep soldiers safe. We brief them on the hazards; we give them all the information we have to help them help themselves, and they don't use it. It's these times that we seem to be fighting the "lessons we refuse to learn." Soldiers don't go out with the intention of having an accident. Accidents occur when victims are not familiar with the hazards and controls, or when they are ignored. The risk-management process helps one to identify hazards and take steps to eliminate risk. This process is commonly used in military operations, but can also be applied to recreational water-related activities as well.

So, what can leaders do?

Don't give up. Leaders must implement risk management on every mission, on and off duty. Just because you don't look at a day on the water as a "mission," you can still use this tool for your protection, as well as the protection of your family and friends.

Apply risk management to boating

1. **Identify the hazards.** Hazards are dangerous conditions that could be encountered while performing a task or mission. For example, what are the hazards in taking a boat out? Hazards could include: cold water, strong currents, high wind and waves and unseen debris in the water. Reviewing other facts such as boat capabilities, operator and passenger skills and condition of equipment can identify other hazards.

2. **Assess the hazards.** Each identified hazard must be assessed to determine the probability of it causing a problem and the severity of the consequences should such a problem occur. For example: calm, warm water, a sturdy boat and a seasoned crew indicate minimal risk with few controls needed. However, a strong current, cold water and high waves, coupled with a leaky boat and inexperienced boaters indicate a much higher risk. Such conditions increase the likelihood and severity of an adverse outcome, resulting in losing directional control, getting lost, colliding, swamping, capsizing, hypothermia or drowning. The hazard with the highest risk determines the risk for the operation: low, medium, high or extremely high.

3. **Develop controls and make a decision.** Controls for low risk may be as simple as conducting a short safety briefing and ensuring everyone is wearing PFDs. More strenuous controls would need to be enforced for high-risk operations. The boat operator would provide each person with guidance on what hazards to look for and instructions on what to do to deal with them. If the operator's instructions are on target and are effectively implemented, then the risk should be acceptably low enough to have a safe boating experience.

4. **Implement controls.** The controls established are put into effect by the boat operator.

5. **Supervise.** Supervision goes beyond ensuring that people do what is expected of them. It includes following up during and after an action to ensure that all went according to plan, reevaluating the plan or making adjustments as required to accommodate unforeseen hazards, and incorporating lessons learned for future use.

Have a safe summer!

SIDEBAR:

Leaders need to continually stress -

- Water safety during the summer season. Place special emphasis on the hazards of water activities and the possible consequences of horseplay.
- The importance of safety equipment such as life jackets, especially for weak or nonswimmers. In addition, stress the importance of not overloading any equipment.
- The hazards of mixing alcohol with recreational water activities. The mixture can end up being anything but fun.
- That soldiers are their brothers' keepers and they must take care of each other and take care not to put others in danger through thoughtless actions.