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## Boating and drinking: a dangerous combo

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You would never consider drinking and driving, but do you feel the same about drinking and boating?

If you're ready to enjoy warmer weather from behind the stern, throwing your beer cooler in along with your skis and fishing gear isn't a good idea. In fact, it might get you killed.

Drinking is the leading known contributing factor in fatal boating accidents, comprising approximately 21 percent of deaths and rising, according to the U.S. Coast Guard.

"Many boating accidents involve alcohol, and Soldiers need to understand drinking and operating any type of watercraft, including jet skis, carries the same safety risks and criminal penalties as operating a motor vehicle under the influence," said Tracey Russell, Ground Directorate, U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center.

After alcohol use, the top causes of watercraft accidents include operator inattention, improper lookout, operator inexperience and excessive speed. Weather can also affect operator proficiency.

"The intensity of the sun and how long you're outside can amplify the effects of alcohol, especially when you factor in the motion, sound and vibrations of the marine environment," Russell said. "It's not the same as drinking while sitting in a chair at home near the air conditioner."

In 2014, the Coast Guard reported 4,064 accidents that involved 610 deaths, nearly 2,700 injuries and approximately \$39 million in property damage attributed to recreational boating mishaps. In addition to staying sober, boaters of all ages should take the simple yet critical step of wearing a personal flotation device.

"Where cause of death is known in reported boating accidents, the Coast Guard reports 78 percent of victims drowned and 84 percent were not wearing a life jacket," said Joan Blackwell, USACRC Ground Directorate. "When you're in a boat, wear your flotation device because it could save your life."

For additional information on boating safety, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.