



TEAM Georgia

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GEORGIA DNR AND TEAM GEORGIA URGE GOOD JUDGMENT WHEN ALCOHOL, BOATING COMBINE

SOCIAL CIRCLE, Ga. (May 21, 2010) –The Georgia Department of Natural Resources and TEAM Georgia, a safe and sober driving and boating coalition, are reminding people to refrain from drinking alcohol while operating a boat or personal watercraft (PWC).

Alcohol, mixed with boating activities, creates dangerous conditions that can lead to tragedy. Last year, conservation rangers made 177 boating under the influence arrests on Georgia waterways and responded to 20 alcohol-related boating incidents.

“It is not illegal to have alcohol in an open container on a boat, nor is it illegal for a person operating a boat to drink, provided they are no less safe,” says Lt. Col. Jeff Weaver, DNR assistant chief of Law Enforcement. “However, if a person is over the age of 21 and has a blood alcohol content of .10 or higher, they are presumed to be less safe and may be charged with boating under the influence.”

The marine environment, such as waves, engine noise, water, sun and wind, accelerates impairment and fatigue in recreational boaters. This can quickly become a hazardous situation when such fatigue is combined with the effects of alcohol.

Alcohol affects a boat operator’s coordination skills, judgment and reaction time. The consumption of alcohol causes inner ear disturbances, affecting the balance and ability of an intoxicated person who falls overboard to determine the correct route to the water’s surface. Alcohol also creates a false sense of warmth in a person and may prevent someone from feeling the effects of hypothermia before it’s too late.

People arrested for BUI may lose their privilege to operate a boat. These privileges are not reinstated until the successful completion of an approved Driving Under the Influence of Alcohol or Drug Use Risk Reduction Program. The offender will be charged with a misdemeanor, punishable with up to a \$1,000 fine and/or up to 12 months in prison.

The BUI law establishes a “zero tolerance” blood alcohol level of .02 for people under age 21 who are operating a boat. Minors who are arrested for BUI will face misdemeanor charges. The law also creates misdemeanor offenses for “endangering a child” if a boat operator transports a child under age 14 while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Furthermore, this law also allows for the revocation of boat operator privileges for people who refuse a sobriety test and/or people who have a blood, breath or urine test that shows the presence of illegal drugs or an alcohol level of .10 or higher.

“Operating a boat is as complicated as driving a car, and a boating incident is as dangerous as an automobile accident,” says Ron Fennel, chairman of TEAM Georgia. “However, many people who would never drive a car intoxicated think it is okay to operate their boat after drinking. Operating a boat while intoxicated is illegal and hazardous to themselves and others on the water.”

To help DNR keep waterways safe, TEAM Georgia's 2010 Safe Boating Campaign will reward those who register as a designated sober operator with a chance to win prizes. To register on-line, visit www.teamgeorgia.net .

Plan ahead to enjoy a great day of boating without alcohol. Take along plenty of food and a variety of drinks, such as water, lemonade, soft drinks or non-alcoholic beer. Plan to limit the time of your trip to avoid becoming fatigued. If it is known in advance that alcohol will be present, designate a driver, both on the boat and back at the ramp, and ensure that all passengers are wearing life jackets.

For more information on boating safety, visit www.goboatgeorgia.com . For more information on TEAM Georgia's 2010 Safe Boating Campaign, call 404.261.6053. TEAM Georgia is a safe and sober driving and boating coalition comprised of business and community leaders, governmental officials and Georgia's professional athletes. The 2010 Safe Boating Campaign is sponsored by TEAM Georgia and prizes are donated by Anheuser-Busch distributors throughout the state.

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