



Safe Boating Campaign
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2019 Annual Awareness Survey

Updated November 15, 2019

Commissioned by National Safe Boating Council
Conducted by WHP Research

BACKGROUND

The National Safe Boating Council (NSBC) is a catalyst for recreational boating safety and promoting a safe boating experience through education, outreach and training initiatives. The Safe Boating Campaign, led by the NSBC, is a worldwide effort focused on responsible boating and the value of voluntary life jacket wear by recreational boaters. The campaign's tagline, Wear It, is now in its 13th year, and the updated campaign logo in its third year.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

NSBC would like to gain insights that might be helpful in improving the Safe Boating Campaign and provide better understanding of the attitudes and behaviors regarding life jacket wear. Specifically, the research objectives are to:

- Collect self-reported life jacket wear
- Determine reasons for wearing or not wearing a life jacket
- Understand boaters' attitudes toward safety
- Gain reactions to ideas that might convince boaters to increase wear of life jackets
- Measure awareness of the new Safe Boating Campaign image

In addition to gaining the above knowledge, through data collection outreach effects and surveying, NSBC will also be promoting safe boating and building awareness of the Safe Boating Campaign and Wear It logo.

METHODOLOGY

A hybrid research approach was undertaken:

- 1) A quantitative online survey
- 2) Follow-up qualitative phone interviews

For the quantitative phase, WHP Research, with input from NSBC, designed and programmed an online survey, which is the second year of using this approach. In prior years, data was collected through on-site intercepts. This year's research results will be compared to the 2018 results, given the same methodology.

To qualify for the survey, an individual must have participated in a recreational boating activity during the 2017, 2018 or 2019 boating season (excluding commercial boats) and must be 18 years of age or older. NSBC communicated and promoted the survey through emails, social media and partner outreach. To encourage participation, respondents had the option to provide contact information for a chance to win a NSBC gift box.

A total of 1,804 surveys were completed between May 20, 2019 and September 27, 2019, taking a participant an average of 5 minutes.

- 2,420 entered the survey
- 1,997 qualified to participate and started the survey
- 1,804 completed the survey (90% completion rate among those who qualified)



Participants are from Canada and every U.S. state, except for Wyoming and the District of Columbia. See Appendix A for number of surveys completed by state.

For the qualitative phase, WHP Research recruited, scheduled and moderated phone interviews with boaters who wear their life jackets “rarely” or “sometimes” and expressed interest in participating in an interview at the end of the online survey. There was a total of four phone interviews, each lasting at most 30 minutes. These individuals received a personalized NSBC gift item as a thank you for their time. See Appendix B for the qualitative results summary.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Safe Boating Campaign, promoted by the Wear It tagline, continues to have a **positive impact** on boaters’ **behavior** regarding safety.

- Those aware of the campaign and/or image are significantly more likely to wear life jackets “always or most of the time” compared to those unaware.

The Safe Boating Campaign also continues to have a positive impact on boaters’ **behaviors and attitudes** regarding safety.

- Significantly more boaters who are aware of the image agree with the safety statements versus those who are unaware.
- Boaters who are aware of the image are significantly more likely to wear a life jacket because they “feel safest when wearing a life jacket/it’s a safe practice” and “it’s automatic – I wouldn’t boat without it on.”

Barriers to life jacket wear are no laws requiring wear, uncomfortable jackets, and/or forgetting or not thinking about wearing one.

Motivators to increase life jacket wear among those who wear them “rarely or never” are a law requiring boaters to wear life jackets, having life jackets that are more comfortable or less bulky, having life jackets that are easy to use/wear, and awareness of boating accidents where wearing a life jacket saved lives.

This year’s results are comparable to last year’s results, with similar suggestions to continue to raise awareness of the Safe Boating Campaign.

- Continue the Safe Boating Campaign, devoting more resources to raise awareness and increase life jacket wear.
- Continue to promote the campaign at boat launch sites, docks, yacht clubs, boating stores, and in other locations that boaters gather, by providing decals and other materials to boaters to encourage them to promote boating safety to others.
- Increase signage which reminds boaters to wear life jackets, especially at rental sites and bodies of water where life jacket wear is required by law (e.g., for children and personal watercraft and human-propelled/manual boats).
- Always require life jacket wear for personal watercraft and human-propelled/manual boats on all bodies of water, including during races or competitions.
- Provide newer and more comfortable life jackets for complimentary use, especially among personal watercraft and human-propelled/manual boat users and renters.
- Continue to promote the campaign at boating shows/events and on-site at rotating locations to share boating stories, emphasizing how life jackets have saved lives, reminding boaters to wear them, and informing boaters about how inflatable life jackets are more comfortable to wear than buoyant life jackets.
- Continue to collaborate with manufacturers to expand the distribution, promotion, and affordability of inflatable life jackets.
- Promote life jacket wear through role modeling (e.g., boating instructors, groups and parents wearing them as a family when boating with children).



- Reach out to production, marketing and media agencies to ensure that boaters in the media are shown wearing life jackets, portraying life jacket usage as routine behavior.
- Continue social media efforts, sharing stories and creating a buzz.
- Continue surveys, increasing awareness of the campaign/image and promoting safety.

For next year's survey, the following suggestions are offered:

- Enact on-site data collection at boating shows and events to extend reach; use unique link for collection.
- Increase efforts to gain survey participation among those 18 to 34 years old and those using human-propelled vessels (e.g. kayak, canoe, row boat, and paddle board).
- Determine whether to keep the new questions from 2019 and/or replace with new questions to provide new insights.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Boaters who recognize the campaign image** are significantly more likely than those who are unaware to:
 - Wear their life jackets “always or most of the time” (72 percent).
 - Wear their life jackets because they “feel safest when wearing a life jacket/it’s a safe practice”; say “it’s automatic – wouldn’t boat without it on”; and “have heard of situations where a life jacket has saved a life.”
 - Agree with the statements: “I try to boat safely and responsibly at all times”; “I believe drowning fatalities related to boating accidents would be dramatically reduced if more people wore life jackets”; “I worry about other boaters and their unsafe practices”; “It is important for me as a boater to encourage others to wear life jackets at all times when boating or fishing”; and “I have been involved in a situation this boating season where a life jacket was useful or needed.”
 - Be aware of the life jacket law in their state (88 percent who are aware of image versus 70 percent who are not aware).
- **The top two barriers to using life jackets** are “I am not required to wear one by law” (significantly the highest among boaters not using a personal watercraft or manual boat) and “a life jacket is uncomfortable” (top reason among those using a personal watercraft or manual propelled vessel). Participants explain that life jackets are too hot, interfere with their activities, might not fit properly, are not needed in calm or low water, or are using a large boat.
- **Boaters who wear their life jackets “always or most of the time”** are significantly more likely than other boaters to:
 - Recognize the campaign image (75 percent).
 - Wear their life jackets because they “feel safest when wearing a life jacket/it’s a safe practice” (66 percent); “it’s automatic – I wouldn’t boat without it on” (59 percent); and “have heard of situations where a life jacket has saved a life” (43 percent).
 - Be less likely than other boaters to select the statement: “I wear a life jacket when conditions or weather is bad or expected to worsen” as a reason for wearing them (23 percent versus 67 percent of “sometimes” and 70 percent of “rarely/never” wear life jackets).
 - Agree with the statements: “I try to boat safely and responsibly at all times”; “I believe drowning fatalities related to boating accidents would be dramatically reduced if more people wore life jackets”; “I worry about other boaters and their unsafe practices”; “It is important for me as a boater to encourage others to wear life jackets at all times when boating or fishing”; and “I have been involved in a situation this boating season where a life jacket was useful or needed.”
- Having more comfortable or less bulky life jackets and/or a law requiring boaters to wear life jackets would **motivate more boaters to wear life jackets more often**. In addition, some participants said having a life jacket that was easy to use/wear would convince them to wear their life jackets more often.



- Almost all boat owners (99 percent) own life jackets. One-third (33 percent) of them own inflatable life jackets.
- Among those not owning a boat, 74 percent own a buoyant and/or inflatable life jacket.
- About one-fourth (24 percent) of personal watercraft/human propelled boaters also said that being in “a boating accident where the wear of a life jacket saved my life or the life of someone else” or “if life jackets were provided for free” are also motivators.
- Among all participants, 21 percent said that being in “a boating accident where the wear of a life jacket saved my life or the life of someone else” is a motivator.
- **Results from new questions that were added this year are:**
 - Most boaters (91 percent) feel that people who wear life jackets are most likely to be “responsible boaters.”
 - Two-thirds (67 percent) of boaters consider themselves to be “boat operators.”
 - Among these boat operators, 58 percent always require their passengers to wear life jackets.
 - Among those who do not require their passengers to wear life jackets, the most often mentioned reason is “I am not required to by law” (57 percent).
 - More than one-fourth (27 percent) of non-owners of boats said they rented a boat the last time they went boating. Those using personal watercrafts or manual propelled vessels are most likely to rent (42 percent).
 - On average, boaters estimate that the percentage of boaters, like themselves, that wear life jackets when boating is 41 percent; mode is 20 to 29 percent; and median is about 39 percent.
 - On average, boaters estimate the percentage of motorboat owners, with boats under 25 feet long, who wear life jackets when boating is 33 percent; mode is 20 to 29 percent; and median is 29 percent.

When comparing results to 2018, the following differences are noted:

- Awareness levels of the campaign image are higher, with 69 percent recognizing the image this year versus 60 percent last year.
- Significantly more of this year’s participants say they “always or most of the time” wear life jackets than in 2018 (66 percent versus 56 percent, respectively). Significantly fewer boaters indicate that they “rarely or never” wear life jackets than in 2018 (17 percent versus 27 percent, respectively).
- Increases in life jacket wear are also noted by type of boat, among both personal watercraft / manual propelled boaters (from 83 percent in 2018 to 88 percent in 2019) and other types (from 47 percent in 2018 to 57 percent in 2019).
- Two “reasons for wearing life jackets” statements has increased significantly this year versus 2018, specifically on “I have heard of situations where a life jacket has saved a life” and “I know someone who was in a boating accident.”
- Agreement with the “reasons for not wearing life jacket” statement: “I don’t need to wear a life jacket because I’m a strong swimmer” increased significantly, from 7 percent in 2018 to 11 percent in 2019.
- One attitudinal statement increased: “I am a very strong swimmer” (from 64 percent in 2018 to 67 percent in 2019).
- Three reasons that would convince boaters to wear life jackets more often increased from last year, including “If life jackets were provided for free”; “If I had a life jacket that was more stylish”; and “Seeing well-known celebrities or athletes wearing life jackets when boating.” Note, only 16 percent, 10 percent and 5 percent, respectively, selected these reasons as motivators to wear life jackets more often.
- Participants in the 2019 survey were significantly more likely than 2018 participants to have most recently used an open motorboat or cabin motorboat and a human propelled vessel.
- Ownership of inflatables decreased from last year, with 37 percent owning an inflatable in 2018 versus 30 percent in 2019.
- This year’s participants skew female, younger, and are significantly more likely to have children under 18 years of age. In addition, they are significantly more likely to have learned about the survey via social media compared to last year (86 percent in 2019 versus 72 percent in 2018).