

## **A Condensed History of National Safe Boating Week**

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**Taken from *'The Modern History of Recreational Boating Safety'* published and with permission of the National Safe Boating Council ([www.safeboatingcouncil.org](http://www.safeboatingcouncil.org))**

It all began with Steve Sadowski, a Coast Guard Auxiliarist in Amesbury, MA, who persuaded the town to issue a proclamation on Auxiliary Day, in June 1949. Three years later, he helped organize a CME (Courtesy Marine Examination, now termed Vessel Safety Check) weekend which led to the idea of a Safe Boating Week. This then pulled in governors from Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Auxiliarists in Hawaii broke new ground in 1956 by enlisting a local entertainer, "Lucky" Luck to promote CME's and Safe Boating Week. Luck appeared on the television show, "Hawaii Five-O", which opened the door for celebrities to give the week a boost. In 1957, Auxiliary leadership launched the first nationwide observance during the week of June 30 – July 6.

The Coast Guard then prepared a formal resolution to establish National Safe Boating Week (NSBW) and convened a committee from industry, yachting groups, the Auxiliary and the United States Power Squadrons (USPS) to promote the resolution. Representative Charles Chamberlain, MI, sponsored a bill which passed on June 4, 1958. The Senate insisted on dates covering July 4<sup>th</sup>, and the NSBW was kicked off with a publicity bang by President Eisenhower's White House.

The Federal Safe Boating Act of 1958 became law just months later, and the National Safe Boating Week Committee (later to become the National Safe Boating Council – NSBC) was formed. Since the Coast Guard had no funds for the observance, Guy Hughes, Outboard Club of America, provided kits, posters and rounded up other organizations, such as the Girl & Boy Scouts, American Red Cross, National Safety Council, American Yachtsmen Association, and the National Association of Marine Dealers, which got the Campaign underway.

In the 1960's fiberglass power boats became affordable and water skiing became popular. The American Water Ski Association joined NSBW to buffer the sport's tarnished image, to repair apparent damage and to ward off government regulation. In 1964 the Coast Guard established a Boating Safety Division at their Headquarters and authorized their districts to follow suit. In that year the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) established a Boating Safety Education Committee and signed on to the NSBW.

The Federal Safe Boating Act of 1971 transformed the boating landscape and introduced funding for the states among other notable changes. That Act made arrangements between many organizations possible and organized enforcement activity under the Coast Guard, providing order and energy to this rapidly expanding activity.

The 1971 Act also spurred organizations to join; and due to Federal funding limitations, turned to the non-profit National Safe Boating Week Committee to become the national focus. Meetings in early 1972 with all the major boating organizations reached a unanimous conclusion to turn the Committee into a National Safe Boating Committee, incorporate in Washington, DC, and make the mission year round, rather than linked to a single week. This was accomplished in 1973, and in 1974 it became the NSBC, Inc. Part of its charter was to prepare promotional materials and unite the various organizations.

The Bicentennial celebration in 1976 gave NSBC a huge opportunity with the Tall Ships – OPSAIL to kick off radio and television programs, safety exhibits, search and rescue demonstrations, parades, open houses, posters, milk cartons and give-aways promoting boating safety.

NSBC responded and also in 1976 inaugurated the annual Boating Education Seminar, and moved NSBW to early June, in that many boats were already in the water by July 4. The week migrated to early June by 1981. Some urged an earlier date and the National Boating Safety Advisory Council (NBSAC) joined the cause persuading the Coast Guard in 1993 to designate the first full week before Memorial Day in May as NSBW. NSBC kept the focus on a year round effort using the NSBW as the kick-off signature event.

The passage of Wallop-Breaux in 1984 provided a steadier source of funding for State recreational boating engagement, as well as a non-profit grant program. 1987 brought Popeye to the Campaign and in 1998 “Coastie”, the robotic boat, joined in Auxiliary efforts. NSBC introduced “Sidekicks” in 2000, a series of booklets, CD’s and a web site to engage children.

In 1997, NSBC and the National Water Safety Congress (NWSC) combined their respective annual conferences and joined in hosting an annual International Boating and Water Safety Summit (IBWSS), which is held in the spring and introduces the Campaign, among other safety presentations. In 2000, Canada adjusted their campaign to coincide with the U. S. venture, elevating the National Safe Boating Campaign to the North American Campaign, with activities coinciding in Washington, DC and Ottawa. This has led to a much closer cooperation between the various boating organizations on both sides of the border.

In 2003 NSBC, in its capacity as coordinator of the Campaign, boiled down numerous catchy and amusing slogans to a blunt command – WEAR IT. The message was as plain as the statistics connecting life jacket wear to survival in accidents. 2001 fatal accidents showed that 80% of those who died had not been wearing a life jacket, and two thirds of all fatal accidents involved a sudden capsizing or fall overboard, merely having a life jacket on board was little help. This issue has been in the headlines for some time now, with various organizations supporting or opposing mandatory wear. Most states now have laws directed at children of various ages, and a Federal regulation has been enacted.

NSBW will continue to generate interest, provide materials, and energize volunteers and safety personnel to spread the message. All 50 States have adopted the Wear It theme in some capacity, tailoring it to their particular state. NSBC continues to provide leadership and impetus to the Campaign, by hiring a public relations specialist whose full time job is to run the Campaign. Web sites and the Internet have provided new openings, as the transmission of the safety message evolves. The site now posts events anywhere in the country with a simple process of entering the event or seeking one in a particular area. Active participation by volunteer units and people is essential to the success of the Campaign, and all are urged to provide feedback to NSBC regarding their successful event.

NSBC, with over 330 member organizations, continues to lead the Campaign and fulfill its mission of providing information and materials for others to promote their own boating safety event. Visit their website at [www.SafeBoatingCampaign.com](http://www.SafeBoatingCampaign.com) for more information. The book, *“The Modern History of Recreational Boating Safety”* is available at:

[http://www.safeboatingcouncil.org/files/pdf/products/Modern\\_History\\_Book\\_Order\\_Form\\_2011.pdf](http://www.safeboatingcouncil.org/files/pdf/products/Modern_History_Book_Order_Form_2011.pdf)

This is a fantastic overview of boating’s history, a must for every professional.