

Boating Under the Influence

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Almost half of all boating accidents involve alcohol. That should be reason enough to leave alcohol consumption for when you are safely ashore with no plans to travel. Stressors, such as exposure to noise, vibration, sun, glare, wind and the motion of the water, affects boat operators and passengers, thus making drinking while boating even more dangerous than drinking and driving.

This table gives a guide to average impacts of alcohol consumption. However, many factors, including prescription medications and fatigue, can affect an individual's response to alcohol, and impairment can occur much more quickly as a result. There is NO safe threshold for drinking and operating a boat, so do not assume you are safe just because you fall into the "rarely" or "possibly" influenced categories.

All states use a Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) limit of 0.08 percent to determine impaired driving cars and boats. This limit can depend on many factors, body weight being one of the primary ones. The following chart shows the effect of body weight on the BAC for the average person.

APPROXIMATE BLOOD ALCOHOL PERCENTAGE									
Drinks	Body Weight in Pounds								Influenced
	100	120	140	160	180	200	220	240	
1	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	RARELY
2	0.09*	0.07*	0.06*	0.06*	0.05*	0.04	0.04	0.04	
3	0.13	0.11	0.09*	0.08*	0.07*	0.07*	0.06*	0.06*	
4	0.18	0.15	0.13	0.11	0.1	0.09*	0.08*	0.07*	POSSIBLY*
5	0.22	0.18	0.16	0.14	0.12	0.11	0.1	0.09*	
6	0.26	0.22	0.19	0.17	0.15	0.13	0.12	0.11	
7	0.31	0.26	0.22	0.19	0.17	0.15	0.14	0.13	DEFINITELY
8	0.35	0.29	0.25	0.22	0.2	0.18	0.16	0.15	
9	0.4	0.33	0.28	0.25	0.22	0.2	0.18	0.17	
10	0.44	0.37	0.31	0.28	0.24	0.22	0.2	0.18	

The asterisk (*) indicates estimated levels of impairment that could mean the individual is possibly influenced. One drink is 1.5 oz. of 80 proof liquor, 12 oz. of beer, or 5 oz. of table wine.

Operating a boat while intoxicated is a federal offense, subject to a \$1,000 fine. In addition, criminal penalties are as high as \$5,000, and may even include jail time.

Massachusetts law establishes the following penalties for Boating Under the Influence (BUI). Those convicted for the first time of BUI may be imprisoned for up to 30 months, and fined up to \$1,000 or

imprisoned and fined. Offenders may also have his or her motor vehicle license and vessel's registration revoked for up to one year.

Other states have similar laws. Keep in mind that a BUI conviction will also affect your car and boat insurance rates.

When you are planning to operate a boat, however, it is best to abstain from drinking altogether, and allow plenty of time in between drinking and operating the vessel (at least one hour per drink). Save it for the mooring. Then add several hours before driving.