

This preparedness guide explains the boating hazards we can get in Florida and suggests life-saving actions YOU can take to avoid getting caught in a dangerous boating situation.

Florida leads the nation with nearly one million registered boats. Another million boaters, with vessels not registered in Florida, use Florida's waterways each year. This is why it is important to know and practice safe boating.

Each year Florida sees hundreds of boating accidents, many involving injury or death. Falling overboard is one of the main causes of boating fatalities and this is a trend that grows each year. The leading cause of death in all boating accidents is drowning and over three quarters of all people who drown each year are reportedly not wearing a life-jacket. One of the best ways to protect yourself and your passengers is to wear a personal flotation device.

Another way to stay as safe as possible in the open water is to take boater education classes before you plan a voyage. Nearly three-quarters of all boat captains in reportable boating accidents have no formal boater education.



National Safe Boating Week:

The last full week of May

For more information on boating and marine safety visit:

<http://www.nws.noaa.gov/safeboating/>

www.FloridaDisaster.org



Photo Credit: Stuart Browning

A Guide to Boating Safety



Boating Safety

Each year in our country hundreds of lives are lost, thousands are injured, and millions of dollars of property damage occurs because of preventable boating accidents on U.S. waterways. An enjoyable day with friends and family can quickly turn into a dangerous situation. Here are a few things YOU can do before you leave port to help keep boat operators and passengers safe while enjoying time on the water.

- Be sure to get a **Vessel Safety Check (VSC)**. A VSC is a courtesy examination of your vessel to verify the condition of certain Safety Equipment required by State and Federal Regulations. You can find a VSC location at: <http://www.safetyseal.net/GetVSC/>.
- Take **boating safety courses**. A list of these classes can be found at: http://www.uscgboating.org/safety/boating_safety_courses_.aspx.
- Educate yourself on the dangers of **carbon monoxide** and **Boating Under the Influence**.
- Learn about **life-jackets** and be sure to have one for each passenger.
- Prepare a **float plan**. Without one you are counting on someone else, a friend, neighbor, or family member to remember detailed information that rescuers need in order to find you.



A change in weather and water conditions can be very threatening to boaters who are venturing onto the open waters that surround Florida. Dangerous waves, lightning and waterspouts are just a few of the marine hazards that Florida boaters can face.

Waves are generated by the wind, are constantly changing and can grow quickly. Rough seas build rapidly as wind speeds increase. When seas build to 5 or 6 feet, small craft operation becomes dangerous. When seas build above 7 feet, small craft operators should strongly consider staying in port. Even seasoned captains can be challenged by such large and dangerous waves.



Lightning is more common in Florida than anywhere else in the country. Generally, thunderstorms often affect inland lakes and rivers during the afternoon, while early morning storms are more common along and near the immediate coast. However, the best way to avoid being stranded on the open water when lightning threatens is to check the weather forecast when planning your voyage and stay indoors if thunderstorms are expected.

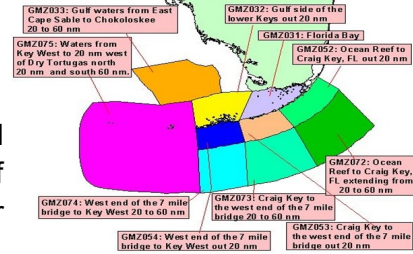


Waterspouts, no matter how large or small, pose a threat to boater safety. The best way to stay safe near a developing waterspout is to avoid it as much as possible. Simply put, waterspouts are tornadoes over water and all have the ability to swamp or capsize a small boat.



Marine Forecasts

The National Weather Service (NWS) issues wind, wave and weather forecasts for the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Ocean coastal waters out to 60 nautical miles from shore. By going to each office's homepage and clicking on the Marine Weather link, you will be able to find Coastal, Offshore and Surf Zone Forecasts, Tide Information, Sea Surface Temperatures, Buoy data and other forms of Marine Weather information.



When dangerous weather conditions threaten, the NWS will issue Watches and Warnings for coastal and offshore waters.

- A **Small Craft Advisory** is issued when sustained winds of 20-33 knots and/or seas of 7 feet or greater, are ongoing or forecast to develop within the next 12 hours. The U.S. Coast Guard considers any vessel less than or equal to 33 feet to be a small craft. Smaller, more weather-sensitive boats can have problems in lower winds or seas.
 - A **Gale Warning** is issued when sustained winds of 34-47 knots, associated with a non-tropical system, are ongoing or forecast to develop within the next 12 hours.
- These forecasts are just a sample of the Marine Weather information you can find from your local NWS that will help you prepared for any offshore outing. We encourage everyone to take a look at these products along with the weather forecast before leaving port.