



Safer When Sober

The New Zealand Safer Boating Forum's position on the use of alcohol and drugs on recreational boats and watercraft.

Our position

"Never drive or paddle a recreational boat or watercraft while under the influence of alcohol or drugs."

Our position is based on what we have learned – from evidence, research and fatality statistics – about the safety risks of being impaired from alcohol and drugs while on the water.

Why boaties are safer when sober

- Impairment from alcohol or drugs increases the likelihood of a boatie having an accident. Symptoms of impairment include:
 - slower reaction times
 - inability to perform simple tasks
 - poor judgment
 - poor coordination
 - inability to navigate effectively
 - boosted level of confidence, which increases risk-taking.
- If you are in control of a recreational boat or any type of watercraft while impaired by alcohol or drugs, you are potentially at least 23 times more likely to have a fatal accident.
- Factors like wind, sun, noise, motion and vibration can magnify the effects of alcohol and drugs and accelerate impairment. This increases the risk of an accident and the likelihood of boaties (and any passengers) ending up in the water.
- Once in the water, being impaired by alcohol or drugs substantially increases a person's risk of drowning by:
 - hindering coordination and the ability to perform simple tasks, like using a VHF radio to call for help
 - increasing disorientation
 - making it harder to stay afloat
 - contributing to muscle, heat and fluid loss
 - making it harder to breathe, and more likely to swallow water
 - reducing awareness of the onset of hypothermia.



The statistics

- Over the past 10 years, **alcohol and drugs have played a part in an estimated average of 5 recreational boating and watercraft fatalities per year – a total of 50.**
- **Our Boating Safety Strategy review (2007) estimated alcohol consumption was involved in 18% of recreational boating and watercraft accidents** that resulted in fatalities between 2000 and 2006, based on post-mortem investigations.
- The actual percentage of alcohol-related **recreational boating and watercraft** fatalities, however, is likely to be higher, because:
 - alcohol and drug testing was not always carried out in post-mortems so undoubtedly more cases went unreported
 - an Australian study found alcohol to be a factor in 28% of recreational boating and watercraft fatalities in Australia in 2005, while a US study showed alcohol was the 'leading contributing' factor in 16% of US boating fatalities in 2011.
- The New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (NZIER), therefore, suggests **substance impairment is likely to be a contributing factor in around 25% of New Zealand's recreational boating and watercraft fatalities.**

BUT, some boaters continue to drink on board:

- **Approximately 62%* of boaters avoid alcohol every time** they go to sea (a 5% decrease since 2018).
- **Approximately 86%* of boaters avoid alcohol at least most of the time** (a 3% decrease since 2018).

* 2019 Recreational Boating Participation Research (IPSOS)

Our guidelines

- We strongly urge boaters to never operate a boat or watercraft when under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
 - Under the Maritime Transport Act, skippers are responsible for the safety and wellbeing of everyone on board, and should be capable of performing all tasks required of them. Clearly, a skipper under the influence of alcohol or drugs cannot properly meet those responsibilities.
- We also recommend passengers avoid consuming alcohol and drugs.
 - Impairment from alcohol or drugs significantly increases the risk of drowning when in the water.

The Insurance Council advises that if you are intoxicated then you would void your boat insurance.