**POLICE PREPARE FOR 2-4 BLITZ**

Police are bracing for the upcoming long weekend, which historically has been a deadly time. Not just the roadways, but waterways have been areas of heartbreak to the families of those who say they don't need to wear a lifejacket.

A 16 year Transport Canada study by the Office of Boating Safety reveals some pretty embarrassing facts about those who use the waterways for recreational purposes.

“It is astounding to note,” the 2010 report reads, “that in exposure to boating, where the most frequent injury incidents involve capsizing and falling overboard, non-swimmers and weak swimmers continue to boat without a floatation device, and drown as a result.”

Search and Rescue personnel know all too well that even consummate swimmers have great difficulty putting a lifejacket on once they've fallen in the water, especially when it is as cold as the water usually is in Canada.

The added issue of cold water shock is that sudden exposure triggers an automatic gasp reflex that causes people to suddenly inhale a litre or more of icy water. Without a lifejacket properly fastened, death is moments away.

**Stiff penalties aim to curb impaired boaters**

What the experts find particularly astounding is that boat operators feel perfectly confident boating under the influence of alcohol. A Red Cross study found that 37% of boaters in Canada drink alcohol every time they boat. About 66% of boaters admit to partaking sometimes. What most don't realize is that almost half of all boating fatalities are alcohol related.

The consequences have been so serious that both federal and provincial statutes exist to try to slow down alcohol related tragedies on the water. Any vessel operator caught under the influence can lose boating privileges, and in the province of Ontario, vehicle driver’s licences can be revoked for a year, upon conviction, where the person’s blood alcohol concentration exceeds the .08 threshold.

Alcohol is often called 'false courage.' Interestingly, the mind numbing effect that alcohol has on boaters can be almost doubled by sun, wind and waves. In an experiment called the *Drinking and Boating Test, a* mixed group of boaters were selected to manoeuvre through a challenging obstacle course before and following consumption of alcohol. Even after minute blood levels of alcohol were acquired, participants knocked into dummy people appearing in the water and they frequently failed to negotiate throughways. One participant in the experiment said she was surprised at what she couldn't do after just a little alcohol. “Your perception, your brain, nothing is working and nothing's really quick, you're not quick on the draw like you normally are when you're sober,” she says.

**Safe Boating is No Accident**

Other factors affecting boater safety that police will be checking for this long weekend, which is also the kick-off of North American Safe Boating Awareness Week, include proper preparation (charts and appropriate equipment on board), boater card for the operator, a safe number of occupants for the vessel and safe operation (taking into consideration weather and observation of boating rules).

To view the Drinking and Boating Test video or to find out what you need to be in compliance with your particular craft, visit the website [www.SmartBoater.ca](http://www.SmartBoater.ca)