

Fact Sheet

- Excess alcohol was one of the top five primary causes of fatal incidents on NSW waterways over the past 10 years. Excess alcohol was recorded as being the cause of 5.6 per cent of fatal incidents over that period.
- It is likely that alcohol is a factor in a much larger proportion of serious boating incidents than suggested by the available incident reporting.
- There is insufficient data to gauge which demographics are more prone to excessive drinking while boating.

Alcohol related incident statistics

- Excess alcohol was the recorded primary cause for 5.6 per cent of fatal incidents over the past 10 years in the most recent boating incidents report published by Transport for NSW, ranking it in the top five after weather conditions (13.5 per cent), excessive speed (8.7 per cent), hazardous waters (7.9 per cent) and lack of/poor judgement (7.9 per cent)
- Excess alcohol was the recorded primary cause for 3.8 per cent of serious injury incidents over the past 10 years ranking it seventh after lack of/poor judgement (16.7 per cent), no proper lookout (11.3 per cent), excessive speed (6.1 per cent), wash (5.4 per cent), weather conditions (5.2 per cent), and hazardous waters (4.5 per cent)
- Excess alcohol was recorded as the primary cause for a relatively small number of incidents overall over the past 10 years (1.5 per cent). However, this might be due to under-reporting. It is unlikely that boaters filling out their own Vessel Incident Report forms would volunteer the fact that they were over the legal limit when the incident occurred
- Incidents caused by an excess of alcohol were significantly more likely to result in serious injury, and there was considerable evidence of the same being true for fatal incidents
- The Royal Life Saving Society recorded alcohol as being involved in over one quarter (26.2 per cent) of boating and watercraft drowning deaths Australia-wide over the decade spanning 2005-2015. Of those 124 cases where alcohol was involved, 73 (58.8 per cent) had a blood alcohol level at or above 0.05mg/L.
- More drowning deaths involving alcohol occurred in NSW over the 10 years spanning 2005-2015 than in any other state (41 out of 149). Queensland recorded the next highest number of drowning deaths involving alcohol (34), followed by Western Australia (13).
- During the 10 year period spanning 2005-2015, inland locations recorded more drowning deaths involving alcohol than other locations. Alcohol was considered relevant to 21 drowning deaths that occurred in lakes, dams or

lagoons and 43 that occurred in rivers, creeks and streams. Cumulatively, a total of 64 drowning deaths where alcohol was considered relevant occurred in inland waters. This is compared to a total of 59 drowning deaths related to alcohol recorded for the ocean, harbours or the beach.

- Alcohol was involved in a greater proportion of drownings in river/creek/stream locations (31.4 per cent) and lake/dam/lagoon locations (20.0%) than in beaches (4.2 per cent) or ocean/harbour locations (11.7 per cent) in Australia in the decade spanning 2005-2015
- Fishing (35.1 per cent) or moving (28.4 per cent) were the activities most commonly associated with alcohol related drowning deaths Australia-wide during the decade spanning 2005-2015. Falls overboard while the individual had a blood alcohol level over 0.05 mg/L comprised the next highest proportion (12.2%).

Key issues for alcohol

- 26.2 per cent of boating and watercraft drowning deaths that occurred in Australia in the decade spanning 2005-2015 involved alcohol. Of these, over half were over the legal limit of 0.05 mg/L
- More drowning deaths involving alcohol and all water-based activity occurred in NSW over the 10 years spanning 2005-2015 than in any other state (41 out of 149)
- Incidents caused by excess alcohol have a higher likelihood of being serious (i.e. resulting in serious injury)
- An excess of alcohol could be contributory to incidents that it did not primarily cause (i.e. boaters could become more vulnerable to other primary causes because alcohol slows reaction time, creates a false sense of over-confidence etc.)
- A significant proportion of boating incidents are self-reported – these are unlikely to record excess alcohol as the primary cause
- While enforcement is a useful tool for discouraging boaters from boating while over the legal limit, there are a limited number of boating safety/enforcement officers and NSW Police. People must be reminded of their personal responsibility when boating.

ends.

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