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July 25: Boating Safety

Reported by: [Hagit Limor](#)
Photographed by: [Tony Mirones](#)
Web produced by: [Neil Relyea](#)
 7/25/04 10:55:18 PM

9News Anchor, on set:
 Where in the Tri-state can you speed in reduced speed zones, crash into other vehicles, even hurt or kill people by causing crashes -- and never lose your license?

In lot's of places actually. The I-Team's Hagit Limor has been investigating, and joins us with the answer.

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, on set:
 Not only that, but the places we're talking about, you can drive with absolutely no training.

And you don't have to pass a state driving test. You don't have to have insurance on your vehicle.

You don't have to live by the laws of the land, at all.

I-Team ((("BONG"))) and animation

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:
 Just another carefree day on the Tri-state's biggest natural water park -- the Ohio River.

As busy as any thoroughfare, it carries commerce and everyday traffic, like any other road.

But this road doesn't have the same rules.

AUDIO/VIDEO

[Watch this I-Team video](#)
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Speeding in a no-wake zone?
 (WCPO/WCPO.com)

Jim Barnes lost his daughter in a fatal boating accident
 (WCPO/WCPO.com)

BOATING SAFETY INSTRUCTIONS

- Mandatory safety classes
- Link driver's license to water violations
- Mandatory insurance coverage
- Increased fines

Boating Safety Recommendations

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9 NEWS EXCLUSIVE

Hey boys and girls!

Accident Witness, on camera:

"We heard a 'wham.' Then we heard some people screaming and yelling."

Doug Howard, Accident Victim, on camera:

"I felt my arm explode. I looked up at my cousin and he said, 'We got hit by a boat.'"

Chris Hankins, Williamstown Asst Police Chief, on camera:

"You're like at a loss, a total loss, like what can I do?"

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:

It's no wonder -- even the police are at a loss; in some way, boating is like the Wild West.

Doug Howard, Accident Victim, on camera:

"It is kind of like, 'Well, we are on the water. There are no laws.'"

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:

Where no matter what you do, you can't lose your license, because there is no boating license.

Jim Barnes, Accident Victim's Father, on camera:

"It should be just like an automobile."

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:

There isn't even any requirement for one second of training, before you launch.

Dale Appel, Boone County Water Rescue, on camera:

"You have very little instruction when you get behind the boat wheel. I don't think it is safe."

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:

For two months the I-Team rode along with the coast guard and other police and water rescue agencies.

Officer Malone, on camera:

"Have you had anything to drink tonight?"

Boater, on camera:

"Have I? Yes, sir, I had one beer."

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:

. . . on patrol, by day and by night.

At the same time, we got the guard's most current database on boating accidents in the Tri-state for a six-year period through 2001.

What we found shows that lax laws contribute to human error and leave tragedy in their wake.

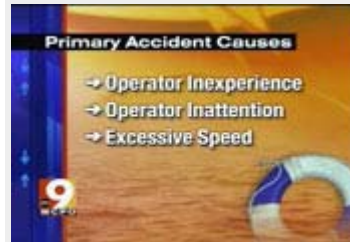
Jim Barnes, Accident Victim's Father, on camera:

"You talk about closure. There is none. There never will be. To lose one like that under those circumstances, you never get over it."

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:

Jim Barnes stands looking at the entrance to Watertown Marina, where his daughter and two others lost their lives in a collision with another boat.

(WCPO/WCPO.com)



Primary causes of accidents
(WCPO/WCPO.com)

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[Search Continues For "Hit and Run" Boat Pilot \(06/29/03\)](#)

Jim Barnes, Accident Victim's Father, on camera:

"You have to respect the river for what it is. The river has no conscience, no character and no soul. That crash happened. Within thirty seconds it was all gone, including three people."

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:

The driver of the other boat got a \$250 fine for driving under the influence. Barnes has been trying ever since to convince state legislatures to make the laws for driving on water, no different than driving on land.

Jim Barnes, Accident Victim's Father, on camera:

"Right now if I got the bucks and I am old enough I could walk into a dealer in the state or in the United States, put down my hard earned cash, buy the boat of my choice, and immediately take it out on a waterway with no instruction."

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:

Indeed the database shows lack of training plays a huge factor.

The biggest cause of accidents isn't equipment failure or bad weather. It's people: inexperience, inattention and speeding.

Jason Brooks, Accident Witness, on camera:

"It was a horrific scene there."

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:

That's what happened last summer.

Steve Abernathy, Accident Victim, on camera:

"I was blind and someone said, 'Sir, you have been in an accident.'"

Doug Howard, Accident Victim, on camera:

"I assume the propeller hit me across here."

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:

Steve Abernathy and Doug Howard rode on this boat with five others when another boat sped into, through and over them -- then took off, leaving behind this terrified six-year old thrown into the water with others, hurt severely. The accused driver goes on trial next month.

Steve Abernathy, Accident Victim, on camera:

"To have somebody run over you and leave you to die is so counter to the way you are supposed to go boating."

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:

But unlike our roadways, it's much harder to patrol and catch the scofflaws on the river.

Officer Thompson, Ohio Division of Watercraft, on camera:

"I'm Officer Thompson with the Ohio Division of Watercraft."

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:

Most of the patrolling we saw amounted to safety checks. Some boaters were able to find life-saving equipment quickly.

Boater, on camera:

"Did you really have to stop us? We were enjoying ourselves."

Officer Malone, on camera:

"Yes, actually I do, sir."

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:

Other boaters had a tougher time.

Officer Malone, on camera:

"A sound producing device, a horn, a whistle?"

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:

This one had to look around, unfamiliar with the boat as she might be with a car.

Officer Malone, on camera:

"A fire extinguisher?"

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:

And it took her crew a minute, 24 seconds to find this important safety device. If this were an emergency, that could be a fatal mistake.

Ohio Watercraft Officer Travens Johnson says it amazes him people who buckle up on land, won't on water.

Officer Travens Johnson, Ohio Watercraft Officer, on camera:

"Because if you fall out of the boat without a life jacket, then nine times out of ten, you're probably going to drown if you're not a good swimmer or even if you are a good swimmer."

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:

Our data search proved him right. Twenty-two of the 25 who died in boating accidents had no personal floatation devices, even though half of them couldn't swim! Of those who died, 18-drowned.

The database did offers some surprises. Alcohol ranks far down on the list of accident causes, even though it's a large part of the daily patrol.

Officer Johnson, on camera:

"Be honest with me. How many beers have you had since you left?"

Boater, on camera:

"I had a beer at the dock before we left."

Officer Johnson, on camera:

"A beer?"

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:

And though we saw plenty of evidence of alcohol . . .

Officer Johnson, on camera:

"I would advise you not to drink any more."

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:

No one we saw got a ticket for drinking and driving. That's not to say it doesn't happen.

Dale Appel, Boone County Water Rescue, on camera:

"We've come up on people where the whole boat is passed out. We find boats in the middle of the river that area just floating down and there isn't a soul sober."

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:

Dale Appel runs Boone County Water Rescue. He says in almost 40-years working accidents, he's come to this conclusion.

Dale Appel, Boone County Water Rescue, on camera:

"I think the greatest majority of them are avoidable."

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:

The data supports that. Despite lack of lanes full of nearby traffic, by far the biggest category of accidents -- collisions -- where training might have avoided injuries and saved lives.

Dale Appel, Boone County Water Rescue, on camera:

"I personally think that you should have some kind of training before you get out here for the very first second of going up and down this river.

"I mean when you're driving a car you have some instruction before you get behind the wheel. You have very little instruction when you get behind the boat wheel."

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, voice over video:

And that's what Jim Barnes hopes sinks in with legislators. He says they can fund mandatory safety classes through boat licensing fees.

For now, Barnes looks at the spot that claimed his daughter, and wonders if her death will make any difference.

Jim Barnes, Accident Victim's Father, on camera:

"That next call could be tonight. It could be tomorrow. We don't know. But the river is going to be there, and it is going to continue to run. It goes up and it goes down, but nothing else seems to change."

I-Team ((("BONG"))) and animation

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, on set:

And without change, the deaths keep coming.

Just this summer, two people were run over by a boat on the Ohio River. And a fisherman drowned after a speedboat crashed into his own on Williamstown Lake.

The agencies we rode with can issue tickets with fines, but every officer stressed how much safer everyone would be if there was required training when someone buys a boat.

That's the first on our list of suggestions to increase boating safety:

- Mandatory safety classes
- Linking people's driver's licenses to violations on water
- Make insurance mandatory before you can register a boat, just like a car
- Increasing fines for violations, especially serious charges like DUI

9News Anchor, on set:

Were there any surprises in the database?

I-Team reporter, Hagit Limor, on set:

Contrary to what most people think, see accidents at night, but the vast majority are during the day. Also, calm conditions far outnumber choppy or rough waters.

Contact Hagit Limor

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