

Smooth Sailing

Boating is a big deal in Miami. If you don't own a boat, you know someone who does. Whether you are going out fishing or to just catch a few rays, you must remember to sail safely.

An average of 700 people die every year in recreational boating accidents. Drowning is the number one cause of these fatalities, and 86 percent of drowning victims were not wearing a personal flotation device.

To ensure a safe and fun-filled weekend, MDRF is encouraging residents to consider the following safety tips:

- Wear a Personal Flotation Device (PFD)- One wearable PFD for each person aboard is required, and they should be stowed where readily available. United States Coast Guard statistics indicate that on average, over 600 people drown annually in boating accidents. About 88 percent could have survived if they had worn a PFD.
- Have a fire extinguisher onboard- Fire extinguishers are a very important safety item. Inspect your fire extinguishers monthly to make sure they are properly stored, charged, and undamaged.
- Test your boat lights- Always test your boat lights before you leave the dock. If you use battery-operated lights, always carry extra batteries.
- Alcohol and boating don't mix- Alcohol impairs your judgment, balance and coordination. Over 50 percent of drownings result from boating incidents involving alcohol. Balance is one of the first things you lose when you consume alcohol, and when you combine this with the rocking of the boat, the chances of falling overboard increase.
- Watch the weather- Check weather warnings and forecasts before leaving shore and while at sea. Remain watchful for signs of bad weather and listen to weather radio broadcasts on your VHF radio.
- Develop a float plan- Give a responsible person details about where you will be and how long you will be gone. In the event of an emergency, this information could be the key to finding you and bringing help to your location.
- Hydrate- Drink plenty of water throughout the day. Avoid drinks that contain caffeine, alcohol or high sugar content since they actually contribute to dehydration.
- Use Common Sense- This means operating at a safe speed at all times, especially in crowded areas. Be alert at all times and steer clear of large vessels

and watercrafts that can be restricted in their ability to stop or get out of the way. Be respectful of buoys and other navigational aids which have been placed there to ensure your boating safety.

All boat owners should consider having a Vessel Safety Check. This is a free check conducted by the local Coast Guard Auxiliary for boaters who wish to make sure that their vessel meets all federal and local safety requirements. The Vessel Safety Check is not a law enforcement issue, and no citations are given for any discrepancies. The examiner will make note of the current condition of the vessel and offer suggestions and tips for safety improvements.

The next time you plan your next excursion on the high seas remember these tips to make your day a safe one.

Public Affairs Bureau
Miami-Dade Fire Rescue Department
786-331-5200 Phone

- miamidade.gov/mdfr
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