



2004 NORTH AMERICAN SAFE BOATING CAMPAIGN

www.SafeBoatingCampaign.com

National Safe Boating Week
May 22-28, 2004

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WELCOME!

Safe boating is not accomplished by accident.

Across the country, boating safety professionals work hard to make our waterways safe for a wide range of recreation.

The job requires public education and frequent reminders about safety and responsibility.

A major part of this continuing effort is National Safe Boating Week (NSBW), produced by the National Safe Boating Council and the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) in cooperation with the U.S. Coast Guard.

This section outlines a public information campaign in advance of National Safe Boating Week with details on how to set up your local effort. The following pages contain tips on who should be involved, how to get media and political support, and what NSBW organizers can do to make your campaign a success.

The job requires increasing public awareness, education, and frequent reminders about safety and individual responsibility.

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PART ONE

Getting Flash with Substance!

Television, radio, and newspaper editors have enormous control over what news the public receives. They look for the interesting, the dramatic, and the unusual.

It's your job as a boating safety advocate to make sure your message meets this criteria. It takes persistence to excite and inform the media about your organization's activities and goals.

Once you have established a good working relationship with local news agencies, it will be far easier to get the attention of an editor when a good story comes up – one that puts your group in front of your audience.

Develop a Media List

Perhaps someone already involved with the North American Safe Boating Campaign has compiled such a list. If not, develop a list and maintain good rapport. Include TV and radio stations, daily newspapers, weeklies, magazines, and government websites for your city or county or websites for local parks where boaters go.

Check media directories at your local library. Look for contact information for editors, managing editors, and/or editorial assistants. For TV stations, look or call and ask for the names of news directors, managing editors, or assignment desk managers. Contact these people to find out who handles news stories, events, or public service announcements and ask how you should submit your story.

Understand Deadlines

Give editors/assignment desks at least 24 hours notice before a press conference or special event. Typically, newspapers and TV stations have a 2 or 3 pm deadline.

If you plan a press conference or special event, give your local editors at least 24 hours notice (preferably a "head's up" a week prior) and time the conference so that print and broadcast media can schedule coverage to meet news deadlines.

Give 'Em Grit

Your story must get a reporter's attention. Is it new? Is it unusual? Does it have great pictures and sound? Does it affect many people or pull their heartstrings? Does it relate to another recent or soon-to-happen news event or story?

Instead of holding a press conference in some office, get your news people on the water. Put on a demonstration of life jacket tests, a boat capsize drill, an on-the-water rescue or training exercise for your enforcement people, or any additional "local" issues you want covered.

Television, especially, needs "action footage" to make a broadcast interesting. A good newspaper photographer can capture dramatic still shots of an in-water rescue if you give him/her the chance.

Additionally, provide the photographer with close-up opportunities. Put the photographer (wearing a life jacket) on a boat; don't leave him/her at the dock. Let the reporter try on the latest life jacket. Get them in the middle of the action.

When you speak, give short, complete statements. Don't ramble. Television, and even print reporters operate on "sound bites." If they can get 25 words or less, you increase the odds your quote is used. A typical local TV news bite is from 5-15 seconds long.

Prepare handouts, and have current statistics for reporters to use.

Pointers on Press Events

- Localize the issue. Use boating accident/fatality statistics for your state. Then you can discuss national statistics and how your state compares with the national average.
- If you have a uniform, wear it.
- If you have a life jacket, wear it too!
- Tell the truth, and don't try to ad-lib if you do not know the answer. Promise to get the information to the reporter quickly, and then do it.
- Refer to your handout, especially regarding statistics, in your statement and answers so the reporter is familiar with the material.
- A press release should include specifics about who you are, the name of your organization/agency, dates, locations and times of upcoming activities, and telephone number(s) that reporters can call for updates as your campaign unfolds. Explain your campaign briefly (two to three paragraphs) and note the source(s) of any statistics you provide.

Interviews

Here are some simple guidelines to make your interview a success:

- Be prepared. Do your homework, know your subject, and stick to a couple of main points. Have a statement and practice it. Anticipate some of the questions that might be asked, and prepare answers for them.
- Practice turning around a hostile or skeptical question, and making your point. For example:
Q. "Mr. Smith, why has your group attacked personal watercraft operators?"
A. "We're not singling out any recreational group. We are stressing safe boating and responsible boating so that everyone can enjoy their time on the water. Our goal is to provide recreational boaters with tips on how to avoid and prevent accidents."
- Be quotable. Don't drone on; get your message out in 25 words or less, and make it colorful.
- Use current statistics to back up your statements.
- Be sure you represent your group and not yourself. Mention your group frequently.
- Use the interview to call for action by mentioning a telephone number and/or address for more information or where to find a boating class.
- Avoid using slang or, in particular, government jargon and acronyms. The public gets turned off by "insider" terms they do not readily understand. Use plain English and full names, titles of all institutions, agencies, programs, and reports.

It may be beneficial to educate the boating public to use the acronym "PFD" for Personal Flotation Device. It means the same as life jacket, a term with which the public is familiar.

- Never get into an argument with a reporter because you will lose. Reporters and their editors have the last word, always. Their last word may be ignoring your story altogether.

PART TWO

The Public Service Announcement (PSA)

Writing a Successful PSA

Organizations that support the National Safe Boating Campaign may provide you with Public Service Announcements. If you write your own, remember these points:

- Figure out your target audience — the group you want to reach with your boating safety messages. Once you identify that audience, you can mount a strategy to reach them.
- Have a hook (a campaign phrase, a "buzz word" or "punch line") that gets the listener's attention. We encourage you to use the North American Safe Boating Campaign slogan: "Boat Smart. Boat Safe."
- Make your PSA lively, memorable, and timed to fit exactly at 10, 20 or 30 seconds.

Recording Your PSA

Face it, not everybody has the right voice for broadcasting. On the other hand, you may be the best person to record a PSA.

Remember that the local/personal angle appeals to the media. Can you personalize the PSA by doing it yourself or having a local boater, for instance, tell his or her story with emotion or conviction that comes straight from the heart?

Would a local personality – such as the radio disc jockey, talk host, or well-known newscaster – be a better choice? Make arrangements with personalities/celebrities months in advance so that their schedules allow time for recording.

Here are three places you could record your PSA:

- A radio station. They already have staff and the studio. If you've sold them on airing your PSA, you should have little trouble enlisting their cooperation in recording it.
- A private recording studio. There are more of these than you may think for doing everything from professional music recordings to commercials. Check your local listings; then contact the studio manager, find out costs, and make arrangements. Perhaps their contribution to the North American Safe Boating Campaign could be free studio time.
- Your agency recording facility, if it has one. Make arrangements with the person in charge of this facility.
- Time your PSA before the final recording session. Do several takes, and use the best one.

Placing Your PSA

The next step is to find radio and television stations that cater to your targeted audience. A good starting point is media directories in your local library or even the yellow pages of the telephone directory, or do an online search.

Start making calls. Ask for either the station manager or the public service director. Introduce yourself. By explaining who you are and what your mission is, it may be easier to get a sympathetic ear. It is quite possible they are recreational boaters, too, and maybe they've had some personal experience that puts them squarely in your corner.

Listen to each radio station, and learn the format such as which shows are live or taped. Make a list of the personalities and when they are on the air.

Once the PSAs are recorded, hand deliver them to local radio stations and give them directly to the public service director or station manager. This gives you another opportunity to discuss the issue briefly, thus assuring them of your sincerity and the importance of your cause.

Be sure to send a hard (typewritten) copy of your spot along with the tape in the event a radio station chooses to read the copy. Also, mail each spot with a cover letter explaining your cause, and include a telephone number where you can be contacted. Many stations will also accept PSAs by email, so you will need to convert them into a format like mp3s and email them with a cover letter.

PART THREE

Mounting a Successful Campaign

The successful safe boating campaign can be waged on several fronts, and now is not too early to start. Here are ideas worth considering:

Local Public Schools

The school system is a ready-made arena both for spreading the message and getting grassroots involvement. Young people from elementary through high school age are a prime target audience for the boating safety message.

How can you reach them while enlisting their help in reaching the general public?

- **The Poster Contest.** This has proven to be a successful way to involve local youth in a boating safety campaign. Enlist the support of a few local merchants (a fast food restaurant, sporting goods retailer, and/or boating supply store) to provide some prizes as incentives. The poster contest is also a good way to bring in local business people, which we will discuss in more detail shortly.

Meet with school administration, classroom teachers, and/or art instructor(s), and set guidelines, such as age/class groups, a theme, and a deadline. You might even involve these educators in the judging.

Then open the contest in the local school district(s). Get approval from the school administrator to tell the community newspaper editor about this contest, and arrange for the winners to be recognized, possibly by having their photograph or poster in the paper.

At middle and high school levels, you might opt instead for a textbook cover design contest. The schools with the boating safety message can distribute these.

- **Student Newspapers:** From the junior high school through university level, educational institutions have student newspapers. Contact the editors of these publications and the newspaper advisor/publisher. Discuss the possibility of getting space in the newspaper for your message, and provide current statistics on the number of school-age persons involved in boating accidents.

Here, again, this message can be localized. It is entirely possible that some students at a school, college, or university have been involved in, or the victim of, a boating accident. Bring the issue to the local level by pointing the editor to that case.

Local Churches

The "Blessing of the Boats" has been a seafaring tradition for many generations. With a timely link to the upcoming Memorial Day weekend that follows immediately after National Safe Boating Week, you can enlist the assistance of one or two members of the local clergy to gather at a marina for a brief ceremony. You may also want to invite federal, state, and local agencies. It's also a good photo opportunity for the newspapers and television stations.

Check the telephone book or the religion page of the local newspaper for information on a local ministerial association or church council, and contact them.

Local Businesses

Cooperation from local businesses can generate a lot of activity and support for the safe boating message.

- **Reader Boards:** When a business allows you to put one of your boating safety messages up, it gets plenty of attention from the public and leaves the business owner with a good feeling. Your job is to locate these boards within your community. They may be at banks, schools, churches, retail stores, auto dealerships, grocery stores, city halls, YMCAs/YWCAs, shopping malls, sports arenas or stadiums, and restaurants, including major fast food chains.

Draft the message you want to convey, and tell them when it should run. Make sure the message is brief so motorists and passersby will be able to read it.

- **Flyers/Shoppers:** Here are two market opportunities often overlooked because they are small but reach a lot of people:

Create a flyer on a single 8 1/2 x 11 inch page with one or two colors of ink to give it some splash. Post it on bulletin boards at marinas, docks, tackle shops and campgrounds, or recreation areas. Volunteers can also easily distribute flyers on windshields and at boat ramps, shopping malls, and military exchanges, and commissaries. The shopper is typically distributed free of charge every week as a bulk mailer by grocery and/or hardware stores or a cooperative involving several retail outlets. These shoppers frequently are on the lookout for filler material, and short, bright, and highly visible reminders about your boating safety campaign are naturals.

Remember, make the message short and easy to understand.

- **Restaurant Menus:** It's best to target the restaurants around lakeshores or at the beach, particularly the ones next to docks and marinas.

Even a small space on the back cover serves to get the message to a prime audience. Speak to the restaurant manager, chef, or even the owner about this.

Don't forget the tray liner or paper table place mat. These are great for spreading your message all year round. Restaurants change the designs on these frequently. If the restaurant is part of a chain, start by contacting the local manager, and find who at the head office should be contacted.

Speak to these folks up to six months or a year in advance. Restaurant chains distribute nationally and print their tray liners up to a year in advance.

Rolling Advertising

You can also place ads or messages on the sides of buses or trucks. In the case of buses, contact your local metro bus service headquarters about public service advertising. In many cities or metro-type transit regions, this advertising can be pricey, but there may be provisions for a certain amount of free or low-cost advertising.

When soliciting this type of advertising, present samples of the messages being suggested. Explain your focus and your target audience.

Likewise, posters on the sides of delivery trucks, such as those that carry soft drinks, bread, pastries, or milk, are good choices. These trucks often have corner holders that accommodate posters up to 17 x 22 inches. The posters can be four colors or less, down to basic black and white, in vertical format.

Contact the trucking company and, ask the manager. Explain your program. Don't be surprised if some management team members, and even the company owners, are recreational boaters who will warm right up to your message.

Bench Advertising

There are park bus stop benches in nearly every city and suburb, which can carry advertising of some sort, and frequently do.

Here, again, you will want to contact the manager of the transit line to discuss putting your message on bus benches (or on the sides of bus shelters), while the county or city parks departments are where to start if you want the message on a park bench. Also contact college and university campuses, golf courses, and other sporting event areas.

Parks with some type of lake or pond are naturals for posting a boating safety message. However, these messages also get lots of attention in urban settings at bus stops and shelters.

Billboards

Billboards are another effective way to promote your message.

The best approach is to contact the billboard company. Find out if they have many billboards that have times when there's no display. Ask to get your message posted during such times. Each year, a billboard with the North American Safe Boating Campaign message is available.

Obtaining free billboard space is not as difficult as some might imagine. First, identify the location and sizes of the billboards within your area. Next, identify lighted and unlighted billboards. Those with lighting get round-the-clock visibility, but remember they are typically more expensive.

One business principle that you should not forget is "Location, Location, Location." Even if a billboard in a busy location is available for a shorter period of time than one in a more remote location, the busy location (preferably near a boating area) is always the best choice for exposure.

Therefore, I Proclaim...

If there's one thing a public official likes, it is good press, linking his or her name with a worthy cause.

No cause is worthier than saving lives and preventing tragic accidents. Inform your governor or mayor that you'd like them to be part of an event in which he or she issues an official proclamation for your boating safety campaign.

But before this happens, it's up to you to have a document the politicians can sign. Proclamations and resolutions for the North American Safe Boating Campaign have been around since Dwight Eisenhower was president in the late 1950s so you do have legal language. All you really need to do is have the elected official fill in the blanks and sign it.

However, long before the glitz comes the legwork. At least 30 to 45 days before your scheduled event, start contacting the office of your official(s). You might begin by writing a letter with a follow-up call about one week later. That helps get you acquainted with the politician's staff since it is really these folks who will pencil your event on the official's calendar. Remind the aide with whom you speak that National Safe Boating Week has been observed since 1958 and is supported by several federal agencies including the U.S. Coast Guard.

Be ready with background information that can be used on the proclamation or resolution. You might even obtain a copy of a past resolution that was signed by the President.

I Love a Parade

Parades have been successful ways to publicize an important cause.

What do you need to organize one? First, check with the Chamber of Commerce and mayor's office to find out how many parades are held in your community. Ask about parade permits and other logistics.

Consider working in conjunction with the local Memorial Day parade, and also participate in parades at other times of the year (Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, etc.) with a float bearing the reminder: "Remember National Safe Boating Week is..." and provide a safety message.

A couple of pickup trucks pulling trailered boats with signs in the truck bed announcing Safe Boating Week can suffice. It's particularly good when a local county sheriff's department, the state fish and wildlife agency, and/or local municipal police and fire departments participate with their vehicles and patrol boats.

If your community is on a lake or river, think about staging a boat parade on water. One of the most highly attended events in the Pacific Northwest is the opening day of Seattle's boating season when a parade of boats moves from Lake Union to Lake Washington along the connecting waterway. It attracts thousands of onlookers.

Be sure to tell local news media well in advance about your event so it will get coverage.

Letters and Guest Columns

Newspapers regularly publish letters to the editor and guest columns on a variety of subjects.

A letter or guest column about boating safety timed around the start of boating season or a boating holiday stands a good chance of being published. Be certain to insert statistics where they will get attention.

Localize both with references to a nearby lake or river. Perhaps note a recent rescue or a boating tragedy. If you do make such a reference, be tasteful and sensitive to the feelings of those involved and their families.

It's in the Mail

Contact the local power company or water department, and particularly marinas, and consult with them about the possibility of including a boating safety message in their monthly billing statements.

This can be an effective way of reaching a large audience on a regular basis. You may want to vary the message each month to reflect the changing seasons. Be sure your message is accompanied by a symbol of a life jacket or boat, or both.

The Mascot

Ever hear of PFD Panda? Bobbie the Boat? Coastie? How about Little Toot? Does Bobber ring a bell? Freddie the Fish? Safety Squirrel? Splash Test Dummies? Lennie the Lizard?

All of these are mascots created to spread the boating safety message. They are incredibly effective, and they appeal to the kid in all of us. Bring one of these mascots to a boat show, marina, shopping mall, or some other activity.

Mascots are especially useful for reaching youngsters with your safety message. The children in turn remind their parents. During the school year, it's particularly useful to schedule a visit to the local elementary school by your boating safety mascot accompanied by a water patrol officer. School officials welcome such visits, particularly in conjunction with scheduled student assemblies.

Other Options

Here are other ways to promote your message:

- **Milk Cartons:** This is space that has traditionally carried holiday messages or been used to help locate missing children.

If you have a local dairy that produces its own milk cartons, that's an avenue to explore. Remember that it takes several weeks, sometimes months, of lead time to prepare the message to be printed on the carton.

- The same goes for grocery bags. Paper grocery bags are printed in large lots so you need plenty of lead time, perhaps six months to a year. You may be too late for this year's campaign but it is not too early to make arrangements for next year. Again, keep the message simple and understandable.

It is not a good idea to use dates on grocery bags because that "dates" your message. It is better to print your message with no date so it can be a reminder throughout the year.

This strategy can also be used for ice bags. Remember that this is a plastic medium, and special printing requirements must be considered. However, once these bags are empty, they continue carrying the boating safety message and can double as litter bags on boats.

- **Internal Newsletters:** Company bulletins, agency newsletters, school staff news, union bulletins all serve as great communications vehicles.

Getting space for a boating safety message in one of these publications is relatively simple. The key is to keep your effort local because if you go to an agency-wide publication it becomes harder to get the space.

Some possibilities include the National Park Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Veterans Administration, U.S. Coast Guard, Department of Transportation, Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Postal Service. At the state level, the state education associations, and Departments of Natural Resources, Fish & Game, Agriculture, Trade and Economic Development, Tourism and Licensing are all good bets.

- **Agency Publication:** Many state natural resource agencies publish monthly magazines, and the majority of these are slicks. Contact the editors of these magazines two months ahead of time, and frequently, to get space for your boating safety message.

- **Magazine:** Standard commercial magazines are also likely mediums. Start with the outdoors publications, whether they are boating, hunting and/or fishing oriented. Approach the editor. Some editors are very cooperative.

