

SAFE
Summer



What Have You Done to Save a Life Today?



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Wet fun can be safe fun!

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It was a beautiful day on the water near Long Island, Calif., in the summer of 2005 when Kristin Molinaro set out on a sailboat with her friend, Liz.

Kristin was a Soldier with the 363rd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment out of St. Louis, Mo., at the time and recently promoted to sergeant. She was vacationing at Liz's house to say goodbye to her California friends before being mobilized to deploy in September to Iraq. She spent most of her visit on the beach. Then, she was invited to go on a sailboat owned by Liz's cousin, Mario.

Mario was an experienced sailboat operator with 20 years of boating under his belt and was training for a race, so everyone was serious about the day on the water and wearing personal flotation devices. Mario was teaching Liz how to steer his sailboat, and Kristin, who had never been boating before, was learning to tack. All was well until they changed directions.

"We were about a half hour into the trip, and Liz made a hard turn so we could head back the way we came," Kristin said. "My job during the turn was to untie the ropes on one side and retie them on the other side."

But she wasn't quick enough and wasn't paying attention to the movement of the mast.

"As I bent over to untie the ropes, the mast's boom hit me from behind, and I flipped over

the safety rope on the edge of the sailboat, landing in the water,” she said. “Believe me; you don't realize how fast a boat is moving until you are no longer on it.”

Liz was too inexperienced to know how to slow down or turn the boat around, but as the boat sped away without Kristin, Mario tossed her a buoy. Unfortunately, he had forgotten to tie the rope attaching it to the boat.

“Within a minute, they were a speck on the horizon, and I started thinking about sharks,” Kristin said. “We were about a mile off of Long Island, Calif., and there have been shark sightings there. It took about 10 minutes for the boat to make it back for me.”

Once they arrived, the worried and frightened crew members pulled Kristin aboard. She was soaking wet and had lost her tennis shoes, she said, and her arms were covered in bruises from being dragged onto the boat.

“Two weeks later, a news story reported a man was attacked by a shark in those same waters, so I know it could've been much worse,” Kristin said. “I'm just glad I was wearing the life jacket. Otherwise, I would've sunk like a stone with those shoes on my feet.”

While Kristin survived her dunk in the brink, each year hundreds do not. There were 736 deaths, 3,358 injuries and about \$36 million in property damage stemming from 4,730 recreational boating accidents in 2009, according to statistics released by the U.S. Coast Guard's Office of Auxiliary and Boating Safety.

The top five contributing factors to these accidents were operator inattention, operator inexperience, excessive speed, improper lookout and alcohol consumption.

Instruction and Training

Kristin said the sailboat experience was not just a lesson for her, but a wake-up call for Mario, even though he was an experienced boater. He confessed he'd never had anyone go overboard before, and this was one of the rare times he had asked people to wear life jackets. He also said he'd never expected to use the buoy, so they were lucky it was on board.

The USCGA reported that 86 percent of boating accident deaths occurred on boats where the operator reportedly had not received boating safety instruction. Failure to pay attention,

carelessness, recklessness, inexperience, excessive speed and failure to watch for hazards are contributing factors to accidents and deaths caused by inexperienced operators.

Boaters can find many courses to learn boating safety and the rules of the road such as those taught by the USCGA. These courses provide instruction to boaters at all levels. Courses are taught by experienced and knowledgeable instructors committed to the highest standards of the Coast Guard. Visit <http://www.cgaux.org/> to find classes and locations.

Alcohol and boaters

Alcohol consumption is a major concern in fatal boating accidents and is listed as the leading contributing factor in 16 percent of deaths in 2009, the USCGA reported.

It is not only dangerous to operate a boat when drinking or under the influence of drugs, it's illegal in all states and is a violation of federal law.

Personal Flotation Devices

Nearly 75 percent of the 736 people who died in boating accidents in 2009 drowned, and 84 percent reportedly were not wearing PFDs, according to the USCGA.

As Kristin pointed out, one minute she was in the boat, the next she was in the water, and the boat was moving very quickly. So, it's important for everyone to already be wearing PFDs, before something unexpected occurs. In fact, the PFD probably saved Kristin's life when she was knocked into the water.

"My mother freaked out when I called her after and told her what happened," she said. "At the time, she was a combat medic instructor at Fort Sam Houston's Army Medical Command, Texas, advanced individual training course for medics. She gave me the "worst-case-scenario" talk about how I could've hit my head on the boom, been knocked unconscious and then drowned. It shook her up pretty badly."

More tips from the National Safe Boating Council:

- Be aware of carbon monoxide. Early symptoms include irritated eyes, headache, nausea, weakness and dizziness. Install and maintain a carbon monoxide detector in accommodation areas.

- Get the boat checked. The USCGA and United States Power Squadrons offer a free vessel safety check. Contact www.vesselsafetycheck.org for information.
- Watch the weather to prepare for local conditions and electrical storms.
- Communicate trip details in case of emergency. Give or tell the plan to a friend on the mainland and include where you will be, who is on the boat and how long you will be gone.
- Keep all boat maintenance chemicals in their original containers. Post the Poison Control Center telephone No. 1-800-222-1222, on the boat.
- List CPR instructions and a local emergency numbers on the boat. Keep up to date on CPR procedures.
- Maintain constant supervision of children, regardless of their swimming abilities or use of PFDs.
- Do not swim or wade near a boat's exhaust pipe, sit on the swim platform when the engine is running or hold onto the deck while the boat is moving. Keep your boat a minimum of 20 feet from the nearest running generator or engine. Never enter the enclosed exhaust vent area under a swim platform! Exhaust from boat engines can be deadly sources of carbon monoxide poisoning.

For more information about safe boating, visit <http://www.uscgnews.com/>, <http://www.cgaux.org/> or <http://www.safeboatingcouncil.org/>

SIDEBAR: National Association of State Boating Law Administrators recommendations for personal watercraft:

Wear Protective Clothing/Equipment in addition to personal flotation devices at all times. Wear a wet-suit or wet suit bottom while operating or riding in personal watercraft. Normal swimwear does not adequately protect against forceful water entry into the lower body opening(s) of both males and females. Severe internal injuries can occur if water is forced into

body cavities as a result of falling into water or being near jet thrust nozzle. Additional protective equipment (such as footwear, eyewear) may be needed.

- **Keep lanyard attached.** Securely attach engine shut-off cord (lanyard) to the operator's wrist or personal floatation device (as directed) and wear it at all times. If the operator falls off the PWC, the engine will stop.
- **Know how to start and stop the engine.** To start the engine, be sure that the lanyard is attached and push the start button. To stop the engine, push the stop button. However, stopping the engine will not stop the forward motion of the PWC and will result in loss of steering.
- **Know operational controls.** The throttle controls the speed. Apply the throttle lever on the handle to accelerate and release it to slow down. The handlebars move the jet thrust nozzle directing thrust in different directions to steer the PWC. Without thrust, the operator cannot steer the PWC. Do not release the throttle when trying to steer, because the throttle is needed to steer.
- **Take early action to avoid collisions.** PWC's and other boats do not have brakes.
- **Scan Constantly** for people, objects and other boats (including PWCs). Be alert for conditions that limit visibility or block the operator's vision of others.
- **Operate Defensively** at safe speeds, keeping a safe distance away from people, objects and other boats (including PWCs). Do not follow directly behind PWCs or other boats and do not go near others to spray or splash them with water. Avoid sharp turns and other maneuvers that make it difficult for others to avoid a collision.
- **Avoid Aggressive Maneuvers.** This is a high-performance boat—it is not a toy. The operator should ride within their limits and avoid aggressive maneuvers to reduce the risk of loss of control, ejection and collision. Sharp turns or jumping wakes or waves can increase the risk of back/spinal injury (paralysis), facial injuries, and broken legs, ankles or other bones. Do not jump wakes or waves.
- **Do not apply throttle when anyone is at the rear of the PWC.** Items such as long hair,

loose clothing, or PFD straps can become entangled in moving parts resulting in severe injury or drowning. Do not apply the throttle when anyone is standing or swimming toward the rear of the PWC. Water and/or debris exiting jet thrust nozzle can cause serious injury.

- **Know how to right the PWC in open water.** If the PWC capsizes in open water, swim to the rear of the PWC and turn it upright— be sure to turn it in the proper direction. Then board it from the rear.
- **Follow rental agency rules and boating laws.** Review all rental agency rules and applicable boating laws. Do not overload PWC. Do not tow unless the PWC is designed and equipped for towing. Know and follow all state requirements related to towing.
- **Know the waters.** Operator should know the area in which they will be operating and observe all navigational markers and signs.
- **Follow additional owner’s manual PWC warnings and instructions that may apply.** Depending on the circumstances, the owner’s manual and product labels may have relevant information not covered in this basic orientation.



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