

NSBC

celebrates 50 years

By Erika Clemons, Campaign Coordinator, National Safe Boating Council

The National Safe Boating Council has seen vast changes since its inception fifty years ago. In the beginning, the Council was merely a small committee intended to educate boaters about safe boating during National Safe Boating Week each year. The first time there was a week designated to safe boating was in June 1952 when the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary observed a "Safe Boating Week" as a Courtesy Examination weekend in Amesburg, Mass. This tradition continued until 1957 when a more "official" National Safe Boating Week observation took place and was sponsored by the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary in various parts of the country.

The U.S. Coast Guard prepared a resolution, and on June 4, 1958, President Eisenhower signed PL 85-445, which established National Safe Boating Week. National Safe Boating Week was enacted by Congress and proclaimed by the President as the week starting on the first Sunday in July. The National Safe Boating Week Committee, which is now known as the National Safe Boating Council, organized the event by coordinating efforts among the various boating safety groups. It took several years and a lot of effort to get Congress to change the date of National Safe Boating Week, but in 1993, National Safe Boating Week was finally changed to Memorial Weekend each year. This allowed the message of safe boating to reach more boaters before the season and enforce the message for a longer amount of time each year.

Very quickly, the National Safe Boating Week Committee realized that it needed more time and wanted to be more involved

in boating safety than just one week out of the year. The committee felt they needed to be able to provide wider, better channels for organizing and communicating boating safety concerns at the national level. Since the National Safe Boating Week Committee was part of the Coast Guard and related to the Red Cross, it needed to branch out on its own to have the opportunity for grant funding as well as the attention necessary to run a major boating safety effort. After much deliberation, the National Safe Boating Committee Inc. was formally incorporated in 1973. The next year, the committee was reincorporated as the National Safe Boating Council Inc.



The National Safe Boating Council strives to advance and promote safe boating through education and outreach.
Photo courtesy U.S. Coast Guard

Over the years, the National Safe Boating Council lent its efforts to various causes such as adopting a resolution urging the passage of the Biaggi-Eagleton legislation in 1979. The legislation was an important measure in boating history, especially for organizations such as the National Safe Boating Council that were committed to supporting and endorsing safe boating. The National Safe Boating Council worked with other organizations and within its own to create a strong platform that supported its mission: To enhance the safety of the recreational boating experience through education

and outreach. The Council continued to grow and find success throughout the United States not only on a national level but through its campaign as well. The Council did its best to educate the public about safe boating and chose relevant and current issues to support their cause. In 1985, for example, the National Safe Boating Council chose to focus on Boating Under the Influence (BUI) as the theme for that year's campaign.

The goodwill efforts of the National Safe Boating Council were proving to be successful over time. More people were being educated on life jackets, safe boating courses were being taught around the country, and the Council itself was growing in membership. The importance of boater education and outreach was being identified and expressed throughout the U.S.

The National Safe Boating Council continued seeking new ways to reach more people. Throughout the years, the NSBC offered an annual conference to allow participants to present papers and discuss current safety topics. In 1997, the NSBC took their efforts one step farther and joined with the National Water Safety Congress (NWSC) to create one annual event – the International Boating and Water Safety Summit (IBWSS). The Summit sees more involvement and success with each passing year and the message of safer boating is reaching more individuals due to this collaboration of two organizations.

The National Safe Boating Council has known and recognized the importance of reaching specific demographics that may have otherwise been overlooked. In 2000, the NSBC introduced its “Boating Safety Sidekicks” program for children to learn about safe boating practices and how they can become safer boaters. The success of the program is still evident today. Also in 2000, a new partnership helped to cross international boundaries. The official entrance of Canadians transformed



In conjunction with the National Water Safety Congress, the National Safe Boating Council puts on the International Boating and Water Safety Summit. This annual event provides an international forum for the exchange of boating and water safety information.

National Safe Boating Week into a larger phenomenon, the North American Safe Boating Campaign. An international effort and expansion was helping the NSBC reach more people than ever before and allowed more venues to get the message of safe boating out to the public.

The National Safe Boating Council, along with the U.S. Coast Guard and the California Department of Boating and Waterways, took on another initiative in 2006 when it decided to narrow its campaign effort to focus in on a targeted region. California's Sacramento Delta region was chosen as a test program “to see if using a variety of targeted messages aimed at different user groups simultaneously can increase life jacket use” in one designated area. Social marketing had brought a fresh and useful perspective to boating safety efforts and it was evident in the “Wear It!” California Campaign. With California, along with the Council in general, one voice and one message has been adopted. The NSBC teaches the importance to always “Wear It!” and encourages not only its members but also the public to help teach and promote the message as well. By adhering to one central message, it can reach a greater audience and, in effect, have a greater impact on safe boating.

The past fifty years of the National Safe Boating Council has undoubtedly seen change. The Council has had to adapt with the trends seen in recreational boating throughout the past five decades. The NSBC continues to serve as an advocate for boating safety and education as well as acting as a unifying force for organizations to seek the goal of safer boating through education. The Council will continue its drive toward safer boating as it has through the years. The success of the Council is only as great as those willing to be involved in it. The help and support of other organizations and members of the NSBC have made it the success it is today and has, as a result, helped to save lives. The Council will continue to promote and educate on safe boating practices in the hopes of getting more people involved in safe boating for years to come. ■