Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency

2020 Tennessee Boating Incident Statistical Report

Summary of Reportable Boating Incidents

Boating & Law Enforcement Division

2020
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In incidents by Time of Day

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Age of Operators

Vessel Length

Type of Vessels

Type of Incidents

Activity during Incidents

Primary Causes

Incidents by Body of Water

Incidents by County

Incidents by Day of Week

Incidents by Time of Day

2020 Statistics on Personal Watercraft (PWC) Incidents

Age of Operators

Primary Causes

Incidents by Body of Water

Incidents by County

2020 Statistics on Recreational Paddling Incidents

6 Year Trend in Recreational Paddlecraft Incidents

Age of Operators

Primary Causes

Incidents by Body of Water

Incidents by Vessel Type

Incidents by Incident Type

Glossary

Reporting Criteria
HISTORY:

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency acquired the state’s boating program in 1965 with the implementation of the ‘Boating Safety Act’. Before this date the United States Coast Guard (USCG) administered the state’s boating program.

INTRODUCTION:

The 2020 Boating Incident Statistical Report is compiled by the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA), Boating & Law Enforcement Division. The data used in this report is retrieved from “reportable boating incident” reports submitted by TWRA officers who investigate boating incidents and report their findings on TWRA Boating Incident Report forms (BAR). This data is for incidents which occur during the 2020 calendar year.

To be considered a “reportable boating incident”, an incident must involve death, missing person, an injury which requires or should have required treatment beyond first aid, or property damage of $2,000 or more. Tennessee requires operators involved in an incident to immediately notify TWRA and provide certain information to the investigating officer. TWRA officers are required by Agency policy to investigate incidents that meet the reporting criteria.
TWRA officers also investigate commercial whitewater boating incidents that occur throughout the year. Although these incidents are not “recreational”, they are still investigated to capture statistical data and ensure compliance with the law.

At the end of each calendar year, boating incident data is compiled and assembled into Tennessee’s annual report. These statistics are analyzed in an effort to formulate pro-active plans to reduce the number of boating incidents and their related fatalities, injuries, and property damage. The incident information is also reported to the USCG Office of Boating Safety in Washington, D.C. to be included in the National Boating Accident Database consisting of data from all U.S. states, commonwealths, and territories.

Any questions concerning this report should be directed to:

Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency  
Boating & Law Enforcement Division – Investigations  
5107 Edmonson Pike  
Nashville, TN 37211  
Telephone: (615) 781-6682
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2020 REPORTABLE BOATING INCIDENTS

- The total number of registered vessels in 2020 was 246,932. That was a decrease of 7,779 from 2019.
- The total number of reportable incidents in 2020 was 158. That was an increase from 2019 which had 113.
- The incident rate for 2020 was 60.0 per 100,000 registered vessels. This was an increase from 2019 which was 45.4 per 100,000.
- The body of water that reported the most incidents was OLD HICKORY LAKE with 17 incidents.
- The county that reported the most incidents was HAMILTON County with 14.
- The monetary amount of damage resulting from boating incidents in 2020 was $3,268,292. This was an increase from 2019 which reported $1,881,069.
- The most common type of boat involved in an incident was an open motorboat.
- The leading type of incident was Collision with Vessel with 73 occurrences.
- The most common operation during an incident was recreational cruising.
- The leading primary cause of incidents was improper lookout.
- Alcohol and/or drug use was a primary cause in 2% of incidents in 2020. This was a decrease from 2019 which was 7.4% of incidents.
- Rented or borrowed vessels were involved in 14% of incidents in 2020. This was a decrease from 2019 which was 15% of incidents.
• The most likely time to be involved in an incident was between the hours of 4pm to 8pm.
• The most likely day of the week to be involved in an incident was Saturday.
• The leading age group of operators to be involved in an incident was 46 through 50 years old.

2020 BOATING FATALITIES
• The number of recreational boating fatalities for 2020 was 31. This was an increase from 2019 which reported 8.
• The type of incident that resulted in the most fatalities was Recreational Cruising with 11 occurrences.
• The type of vessel that was most common in fatal incidents was the Open Motorboat with 10 incidents.
• The length of vessel that was most common in fatal incidents was 16’ through 26’ with 15 incidents.
• The body of water with the most fatal incidents was Pickwick Lake with 5 incidents.

2020 INJURY INCIDENTS
• The number of injury incidents in 2020 was 53 resulting in 82 injuries.
• The leading contributing cause of injury incidents was Improper Lookout.
• The type of incidents that resulted in the most injuries was collision with vessel with 28 occurrences.
• The body of water that produced the most injury incidents was Old Hickory Lake with 6 incidents.

2020 PROPERTY DAMAGE INCIDENTS
• The number of property damage incidents in 2020 was 74. This was an increase from 2019 which reported 56.
• The type of incident that most commonly resulted in property damage was Collision with Vessel with 41 occurrences.
• The body of water that reported the most property damage incidents was Chickamauga Lake with 10 incidents.

2020 PERSONAL WATERCRAFT (PWC) INCIDENTS
• The number of PWC’s involved in incidents in 2020 was 32, an increase from 2019 which reported 27.
• The number of PWC’s involved in injury incidents in 2020 was 26, an increase from 2019 which reported 21.
• The number of PWC’s involved in fatal incidents in 2020 was 4, which was an increase from 2019 which reported 0.
• The leading primary cause for PWC incidents was careless/reckless operation with 10 occurrences.
• The body of water with the most PWC accidents was Old Hickory Lake with 4 incidents.
• The most common operator age group to be involved in PWC incidents was 16-20 with 7 operators.

2020 RECREATIONAL PADDLECRAFT INCIDENTS
• The number of recreational paddle craft incidents in 2020 was 9. This was an increase from 2019 which reported 3.
• The number of recreational paddle craft fatalities in 2020 was 5. This was an increase from 2019 which reported 2.
• The type of incident that resulted in the most fatalities was Hazardous Waters with 3 occurrences.

2020 LAW ENFORCEMENT SUMMARY
• Total boating law enforcement hours 127,984
• On-Water law enforcement hour(boat log hours) 73,875
• Boating citations issued 897
• BUI arrests 66
• Warning citations issued 542
• Vessels inspected by law enforcement 73,051
• Total number of boating enforcement officers 186 full time
  45 part time
  231 total
• Officers trained in BUI detection in 2020 16
• Officers trained in accident investigation in 2020 16

2020 BOATING EDUCATION SUMMARY
In 2005 a law went into effect that required vessel operators born after January 1, 1989 to have onboard the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA)-issued Boating Safety Education Certificate. Students must pass a monitored exam administered by appointed volunteers or TWRA personnel. All exams are approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA).
• Number of persons successfully completing exam in 2020 5,227
• Number of persons successfully completing exam since 2005 84,350
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**Averages**

|        | 65 | 22 | 114 | 27 | 12 | 49 |
Tennessee Boat Incident Rates 2000-2020

Tennessee Boat Incident 20 Year Totals

- Fatalities
- Injured
- Incidents

Tennessee Boat Incident Rates 2000-2020

- Incident Rate
- Injured Rate
- Fatality Rate

Data for years 2000 to 2020.
Number of Vessels by Operation Type
All Incidents 2020

- Launching/Loading: 4
- Wake/Surf jumping: 5
- Towing a boat: 3
- Sailing: 1
- Rowing/Paddling: 8
- Other: 13
- Drifting: 19
- Docking/Undocking: 9
- Docked (moored): 36
- Cruising: 115
- Changing speed: 39
- Changing direction: 45
- Being towed: 2
- At anchor: 11

Activity at Time of Incident
All Incidents 2020

- Commercial purpose: 2
- Fishing (recreational): 31
- Hunting: 3
- Making repairs: 3
- None: 39
- Recreational cruising: 127
- Skiing, surfing, etc.: 9
- Starting engine: 10
- Swimming, snorkeling: 3
- Tournament fishing: 6
Number of Incidents by Primary Cause
All Incidents 2020

Number of Incidents by Time Period
All Incidents 2020
Number of Incidents by County
All Incidents 2020
Percentage of Rented Vessels by Vessel Type
All Incidents 2020

- Pontoon: 67%, Total = 3
- Open Motorboat: 7%
- Kayak: 4%
- Personal Watercraft: 22%, Total = 2

Number of Borrowed Vessels by Vessel Type
All Incidents 2020

- Kayak: 1
- Open Motorboat: 4
- Personal Watercraft: 9
- Pontoon Boat: 1
Number of Operators by Education Type
All Incidents 2020

Number of Operators by Age Category
Fatal Incidents 2020
Number of Vessels by Vessel Type
Serious Injury Incidents 2020

Number of Vessels by Type of Incident
Serious Injury Incidents 2020
Number of Incidents by County
Serious Injury Incidents 2020

Number of Incidents by Day of Week
Serious Injury Incidents 2020
Number of Vessels by Primary Incident Type
Property Damage Incidents 2020

- Collison-fixed object: 4
- Collision-reating object/person: 13
- Fire/Explosion(fuel): 16
- Fire/Explosion(non-fuel): 14
- Flooding/Swamping: 6
- Grounding: 1
- Sinking: 1
- Struck underwater object: 4
- Collison-vessel: 41
- Recreational cruising: 18

Number of Vessels by Activity During Incident
Property Damage Incidents 2020

- Recreational cruising: 52%
- None: 27%
- Fishing(recreational): 15%
- Making repairs: 1%
- Hunting: 1%
- Starting engine: 2%
- Commercial purpose: 1%
- Skiing(skurfing, etc): 1%
Number of Incidents by County
Property Damage Incidents 2020

Number of Incidents by Day of Week
Property Damage Incidents 2020
Number of Incidents by Time of Day
Property Damage Incidents 2020

Number of Operators by Age Category
Incidents Involving PWCs 2020
Number of Incidents by Primary Cause
Incidents Involving PWCs 2020

- Alcohol Impairment: 5%
- Careless/Reckless Operation: 31%
- Congested Waters: 5%
- Cold Water Immersion: 2%
- Did Not Contribute: 8%
- Excessive Speed: 8%
- Improper Lookout: 8%
- Machinery/Vessel System Failure: 3%
- Off Throttle Loss of Steering: 3%
- Operator Inattention: 10%
- Operator Inexperience: 8%
- Other: 3%
- Sharp Turn: 3%
- Wake from Vessel(s): 3%
- Other: 3%
Number Of Incidents by Body of Water
Recreational Paddlecraft Incidents 2020

- CHICKAMAUGA CREEK: 1
- MEADOW CREEK PARK: 1
- Elk River: 1
- PARKSVILLE LAKE: 1
- OCOEE RIVER: 2
- Caney Fork River: 1
- BUFFALO RIVER: 1
- DUCK RIVER: 1

Percentage of Incidents by Vessel Type
Recreational Paddlecraft Incidents 2019

- Canoe: 37%
- Kayak: 63%
Number of Incidents by Incident Type
Recreational Paddlecraft Incidents 2020

- Flooding/Swamping: 2
- Struck underwater object: 1
- Unknown/Undetermined: 2
- Collision fixed object: 2
- Collision vessel: 1
- Falls overboard: 1
GLOSSARY

**Alcohol Impairment:** When alcoholic beverages are consumed and the investigating official has determined that the operator was impaired or affected while operating the vessel -- or -- the vessel’s passengers were impaired and such impairment contributes to the resultant accident. This includes alcohol consumption that may have occurred outside of the vessel and the occupants are now under the influence.

**At Anchor:** Held in place in the water by an anchor; includes “moored” to a buoy or anchored vessel and “dragging” anchor.”

**Cabin Motorboat:** Motorboats with a cabin which can be completely closed by means of doors or hatches. Large motorboats with cabins, even though referred to as yachts, are considered to be cabin motorboats.

**Capsizing:** Overturning of a vessel. The bottom must become uppermost, except in the case of a sailboat, which lies on its side.

**Carbon Monoxide Poisoning:** Death or injury resulting from an odorless, colorless gas generated from auxiliary vessel equipment (stoves, heaters, refrigerators, generators, hot water heaters, etc.), another vessel’s exhaust, or the exhaust of the vessel on which persons were either aboard or in close proximity.

**Collision with Vessel:** Any striking together of two or more vessels, regardless of operation at time of accident, is a collision. Also includes colliding with the tow of another vessel, regardless of the nature of the tow (e.g., surfboard, ski ropes, skier, tow line). A vessel does not have to be underway to be involved in a collision, but a collision with a vessel moored to a dock or pier is not considered be a collision with a vessel (considered Collision with Fixed Object).

**Collision with fixed object:** The striking of any fixed object, above or below the surface of the water.

**Collision with floating object:** Collision with any waterborne object above or below the surface that is free to move with the tide, current, or wind, except with another vessel.

**Commercial Activity:** The vessel is being used for commercial activity. This type of activity includes carrying passengers for hire; fishing, crabbing, or shrimping in support of one’s business; or charging a fee to tow a vessel.

**Cruising:** Proceeding normally, unrestricted, with an absence of drastic rudder or engine changes.
**Departed Vessel Voluntarily:** Acting of their own free will, and as a first event, occupant departs from the vessel, and the departure results in occupant's injury or death. The vessel from which the occupant departed is not moored, beached or anchored.

**Documented yacht:** A vessel of five or more net tons owned by a citizen of the United States and used exclusively for pleasure with a valid marine document issued by the Coast Guard. Documented vessels are not numbered.

**Drifting:** Underway, but proceeding over the bottom without use of engines, oars or sails; being carried along only by the tide, current, or wind.

**Environmental Conditions Affecting Visibility:** Operator’s ability to discern other vessels or hazards is affected by an external condition in the surrounding environment (e.g., sun glare, fog, background lighting (lights on docks and shorelines, etc.), rain, snow, minimal night visibility due to overcast skies or moon phase, etc.)

**Excessive Speed:** Speed above that which a reasonable and prudent person would have operated under the circumstances that existed. It is not necessarily a speed in excess of a posted limit.

**Falls Overboard:** Falls from the vessel with resulting injury or death. Any unintentional spilling out of person(s) into the water without completely overturning the vessel. Using the vessel as a swimming platform and/or voluntarily departing the vessel as a first event whether the vessel was underway or not, should not be considered a reportable boating accident.

**Fallen Skier:** A person who has fallen off their water skies.

**Fiberglass (plastic) hull:** Hulls of fiber reinforced plastic. The laminate consists of two basic components, the reinforcing material (glass filaments) and the plastic or resin in which it is embedded.

**Fire/explosion (fuel):** Accidental combustion of vessel fuel, liquids, including their vapors, or other substances, such as wood or coal.

**Fire/explosion (other):** Accidental burning or explosion of any material on board except vessel fuels or their vapors.

**Flooding:** Filling with water, by means of entry of the water through a fitting, a drain plug, a hole or crack in the hull, or other means that allows ingress of water through the hull, not over the top of the gunwale, transom, or decking of the vessel. Vessel retains sufficient buoyancy to remain on the surface of the water.

**Fueling:** Any stage of the fueling operation primarily concerned with the introduction of explosive or combustible vapors or liquids on board.
**Grounding:** Bringing vessel’s keel into contact with the bottom so that she ceases to be completely waterborne.

**Hull Failure:** Defect or failure of the structural body of a vessel (i.e., hull material, design, or construction) not including superstructure, masts, or rigging.

**Ignition of Spilled Fuel or Vapor:** Accidental combustion of vessel fuel, liquids, and/or their vapors, regardless of the cause of the spill.

**Improper loading:** Loading, including weight shifting, of the vessel causing instability, limited maneuverability, or dangerously reduced freeboard.

**Improper lookout:** No proper watch; the failure of the operator to perceive danger because no one was serving as lookout, or the person so serving failed in that regard.

**Inboard-outboard:** Propulsion system consisting of an inboard engine connected through the transom to an outboard drive unit. Also known as Inboard/Outdrive.

**Maneuvering:** Changing of course, speed, or similar boat handling action during which a high degree of alertness is required or the boat is imperiled because of the operation, i.e. docking, mooring, undocking, etc.

**Motorboat:** Any vessel equipped with propulsion machinery, not more than sixty-five feet in length.

**Motor vessel:** Any vessel equipped with propulsion machinery (other than steam) more than 65 feet long.

**Navigation Rules Violation:** Violation of the statutory and regulatory rules governing the navigation of vessels other than those listed.

**Numbered vessel:** An undocumented vessel numbered by a state with an approved numbering system or by the Coast Guard under Chapter 123 of title 46, U.S.C.

**Off Throttle Steering:** A term used to describe the lack of steering ability on a jet drive vessel that has no rudder. Steering is accomplished by directing the flow of water from the drive. When no water is flowing from the drive (off throttle) steering ability is lost. Common to Personal Watercraft.

**Open Motorboat:** Craft of open construction specifically built for operating with a motor, including boats canopied or fitted with temporary partial shelters.
**Outboard:** An engine not permanently affixed to the structure of the craft, regardless of the method or location used to mount the engine, e.g. motor wells, “kicker pits”. Motor pockets, etc.

**Overloading:** Excessive loading of the vessel causing instability, limited maneuverability, dangerously reduced freeboard, etc.

**Personal Watercraft (PWC):** Craft less than 13 feet in length designed to be operated by a person or persons sitting, standing or kneeling on the craft rather than within the confines of a hull.

**Rules of the Road:** Statutory and regulatory rules governing navigation of vessels.

**Sailboat or auxiliary sailboat:** Craft intended to be propelled primarily by sail, regardless of size or type.

**Sharp Turn:** An immediate or abrupt change in the vessel’s course or direction

**Skier Mishap:** A person who suffers injury or death by
(1) falling off their water-skis,
(2) striking a fixed or submerged object, or by
(3) becoming entangled or struck by the tow line.
NOTE: Also includes mishaps involving inner-tubes and other devices on which a person can be towed behind a vessel, or surfing on the wake created by the vessel, even if not being towed behind the vessel.

**Sinking:** Losing enough buoyancy to settle below the surface of the water.

**Speeding:** Operating at a speed, possibly below the posted limit, above that which a reasonable and prudent person would operate under the circumstances.

**Steel hull:** Hulls of sheet steel alloy, not those with steel ribs and wood, canvas, or plastic hull coverings.

**Struck by boat or propeller:** Striking of a victim who is outside of the boat, but not necessarily a swimmer.

**Swamping:** Ingress of water over the top of the gunwale, transom, or decking of the vessel. Vessel retains sufficient buoyancy to remain on the surface of the water.

**Towing:** Engaged in towing any vessel or object, other than a person.

**Undetermined:** After thorough investigation, the officer was unable to reach a conclusion as to a contributing cause, due to lack of witnesses or insufficient evidence
**White water Sports:** This vessel was traveling in white water “rapids” where the water conditions were rough and the current very strong (Class 3+).

**Wood hull:** Hulls of plywood, molded plywood, wood planking, or any other fiber in its natural consistency, including those of wooden construction that have been “sheathed” with fiberglass or sheet metal.
Reporting Criteria and Guidelines for Recreational Vessel Incidents

I. Title 33 Code of Federal Regulations, Subchapter S – Boating Safety, Part 173 – Vessel Numbering and Casualty and Accident Reporting, Subpart C – Casualty and Accident Reporting, applies to vessels that are used by their operators for recreational purposes, or that are required to be numbered, except for those vessels required by law to have a Certificate of Inspection.

II. Recreational vessel means any vessel manufactured or operated for pleasure; or leased, rented, or chartered to another for the latter’s pleasure that is propelled or controlled by machinery, sails, oars, paddles, poles, or another vessel.

III. A recreational boating Incident means a recreational vessel, a numbered vessel, or a documented vessel is being used by its operator for recreational purposes AND one or more of the following events occur involving the vessel or its equipment:

- Grounding;
- Capsizing;
- Flooding / Swamping;
- Falls within or overboard a vessel;
- Person(s) ejected from a vessel;
- Person leaves a vessel that is underway to swim for pleasure;
- Person leaves a vessel in an attempt to retrieve a lost item, another person, or another vessel;
- Sinking;
- Fire or Explosion;
- Skier Mishap;
- Collision with another vessel or object;
- Striking a submerged object;
- The vessel, propeller, propulsion unit, or steering machinery strikes a person;
- Carbon Monoxide asphyxiation.

As a general guideline, if any of the above events occur and there is a reasonable likelihood that as a result of the event(s) – an injury, death, or property damage occurs – the incident is a recreational boating incident. More than likely, the boating trip would have been successfully completed without incident had any of the above event(s) not occurred.

IV. The operator of a vessel involved in a recreational boating incident as defined in Section III must submit a casualty or accident report to the reporting authority in the State where the accident occurred when:

a. A person dies;

b. A person is injured and requires medical treatment beyond first aid;

c. Damage to vessels and other property totals $2000 or more or there is a complete loss of any vessel; or

d. A person disappears from the vessel under circumstances that indicate death or injury.
The following guidelines list occurrences directly or indirectly involving a vessel where vessel activities or operation DID NOT contribute to a boating accident as defined in Section III. The occurrences alone are considered to be outside the scope of a boating safety program. While these occurrences may be reported in a State and subsequently captured by the Boating Accident Report Database (BARD) system, they will be classified as “non-reportable recreational boating accidents” in the National BARD system at Coast Guard Headquarters.

a. A person dies or is injured from self-inflicted wounds, alcohol poisoning, ingestion of drugs, controlled substances or poison; or from gunshot wounds.

b. A person dies or is injured from assault by another person or persons while aboard a vessel.

c. A person dies or is injured from natural causes while aboard a vessel.

d. A person dies or is injured while swimming for pleasure from a vessel that IS NOT underway (the vessel is anchored, moored, or docked).

CAUTION needs to be exercised to confirm that the vessel was used as a swimming platform only. The following are REPORTABLE boating incidents involving a swimmer, a recreational vessel and its operation:

- A person dies or is injured while swimming because of Carbon Monoxide asphyxiation;
- A person dies or is injured while swimming because a vessel is improperly connected to shore power and resultant stray electrical current enters the water causing electrocution;
- A person dies or is injured after leaving a vessel that is underway to swim for pleasure because the vessel IS NOT anchored, moored or docked and the vessel drifts away from the swimmer and the swimmer is unable to get back to the vessel.

e. A person dies or is injured in swimming to retrieve an object or a vessel that is adrift from its mooring or dock, having departed from the shore or pier.

f. A person dies, or is injured after falling or jumping from a swim raft that is moored or anchored for use as a swimming platform or other purpose.

g. A person dies, is injured, or property damage occurs while preparing a vessel for launching or retrieving a vessel AND the vessel is not in or upon the water.

h. Damage, injury or death results from a fire on shore or a pier that spreads to a vessel or vessels.
i. A person dies, is injured, or property damage results from an “ice boat” incident. [An “ice boat” is a device that is designed to travel primarily over the ice on lakes and rivers on runners/blades, carrying at least one person and using a sail for propulsion. It is not designed for use nor has the ability to navigate on open water.]

j. Damage, injury or death on a docked or moored vessel resulting from storms, unusual tidal, sea or swell conditions; or when a vessel gets underway in those conditions in an attempt to rescue persons put in peril.

k. Damage to a docked or moored vessel due to theft or any vandalism.

l. Deaths, injury or damage on a docked or moored or anchored non-propelled houseboat or other vessel used primarily as a permanent residence.

m. A person dies or is injured while using underwater breathing apparatus (i.e., snorkeling or scuba diving) and the vessel did not contribute to the casualty.