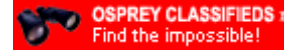


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Public Backs Impaired Boating Penalties - Poll

James Wallace

Queens Park - Monday, August 21, 2006

There is almost unanimous public support for government legislation that imposes harsh new penalties this summer for boaters who drink, shows an SES Research/Osprey Media poll

The new law, which came into effect June 22, gives police the power to order breathalyzer tests on the water and could see those convicted of impaired boating lose their driver's licence for a year.

While controversial, particularly in cottage country where boaters and anglers have long held the view that a beer or two on the water is not only a right but a way of life, the legislation isn't causing waves among voters.

"The poll found nine out of ten Ontarians have a zero tolerance view of operating a boat under the influence of alcohol," said Nik Nanos, president of SES research.

Drinking-related boating accidents and fatalities have become increasingly common on Ontario waterways.

The OPP reports that three-quarters of water fatalities involve drinking and alcohol was involved in the boating-related deaths of 150 people between 1993 and 2003.

The Lifesaving Society also reports 81% of drowning victims are male; 18 - 24-year-olds are most at risk; and just over half of drownings occur on weekend evenings after alcohol consumption.

"Drowning is the most common boating related

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injury associated with alcohol," Transportation Minister Donna Cansfield said in a recent press release. "That's why we treat drinking and operating a boat in much the same way as drinking and driving."

Under the new law, impaired boaters are subject to the following penalties:

- * An immediate 12-hour driver's licence suspension if boaters blow in the "warn" range (0.05 to 0.08 blood alcohol concentration) on a breathalyzer test;
- * An immediate driver's licence suspension for 90 days if a boater blows over 0.08 or refuses to take a test;
- * A driver's licence suspension of one year for a first conviction, three years for a second and possible lifetime suspension for subsequent convictions;
- * A requirement to put an ignition interlock on cars and other vehicles owned by convicted boaters (or abstain from driving) for a period after reinstatement;
- * Mandatory alcohol assessment, education and or treatment and follow-up.

All penalties also apply to people caught operating non-motorized boats while impaired.

The SES/Osprey Media poll found the public overwhelmingly these penalties are appropriate and needed to stop people who operate a boat while under the influence of alcohol.

Just nine per cent of those polled thought it was unfair to link penalties related to operating a boat under the influence of alcohol with someone's driver's license.

"Who is going to step up and say it's o.k. to operate a boat after a few beers," Nanos said. "It just goes to show how much attitudes have changed in regard to drinking in general."

There was a largely insignificant difference in attitude between men and women surveyed. The poll found 85 per cent of men compared to 91 per cent of women believed the new penalties are appropriate and needed while 12 per cent of men compared to seven per cent of women felt the punishments were unfair. There was also a slight dip (84 per cent approval) in the 30 to 39 age group relative to other ages including 18 to 29 year olds (91 per cent approval).

The telephone survey of 507 Ontario voters was conducted between August 12 and August 15. It is considered accurate within 4.4 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

A detailed breakdown of the poll can be obtained at www.sesresearch.com

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