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July 7, 1993

Missing the Boat on Drinking and Boating

Jonathan Howland, PhD; Gordon S. Smith, MD, MPH; Thomas Mangione, PhD; [et al](#)*JAMA*. 1993;270(1):91-92. doi:10.1001/jama.1993.03510010097037

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Abstract

PUBLIC policy has approached drinking and boating as though they are analogous to drinking and driving. Accordingly, recent federal and state laws to prevent drinking and boating have focused solely on alcohol use by the boat operator. Similarly, boating safety campaigns conducted by the alcohol industry have promoted the strategy of the "designated boater," which suggests that passengers are free to drink as much as they like as long as the person driving the boat remains sober.

This singular emphasis on the drinking behavior of boat operators, as opposed to all occupants of the boat, may have several sources. First, there are indeed boating fatalities caused by drunken helmsmen crashing their vessels into other boats, rocks, piers, or other objects, as in the recent tragic crash in Florida involving three professional baseball players. While infrequent, these events tend to be more memorable and attract more publicity than the more common

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