



## 2023 Recreational Boating Incident Summary



**CONSERVE. CONNECT. PROTECT.**

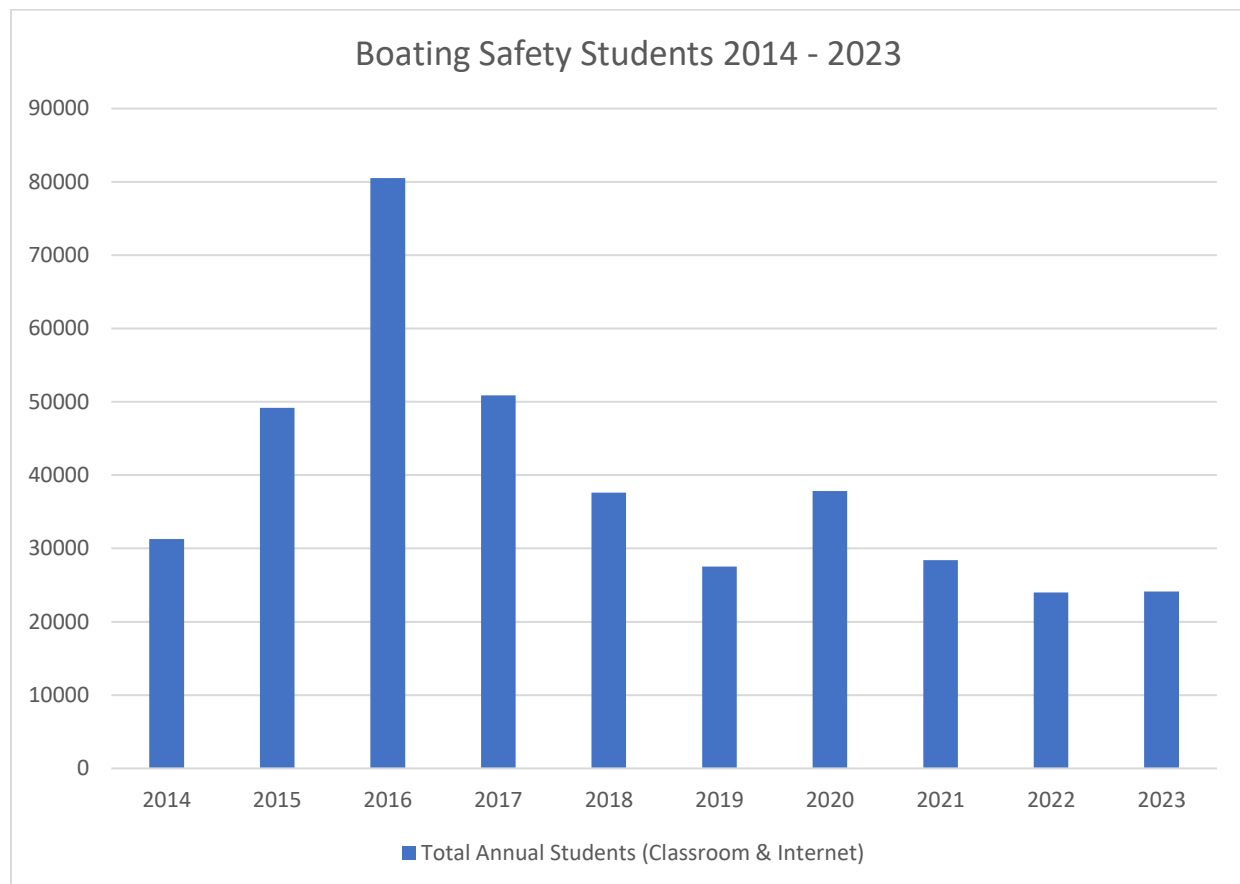
## Introduction

The 2023 Recreational Boating Incident Summary is compiled by the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR), Boating Division. The data used in this report is retrieved by Reportable Boating Incident reports submitted by DWR Conservation Police, Virginia Marine Resources Commission Marine Police, and local law enforcement agencies. Data included in this report is for incidents which occurred during the 2023 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. Virginia requires operators involved in an incident to immediately notify DWR and provide information to the investigating officer.

DWR works to ensure Virginians and visitors are safe when enjoying the water. This is accomplished through proactive law enforcement patrols and statewide boating safety efforts.

A cumulative total of nearly 475,000 Virginians have taken a boating safety education class.



## **Boating in Virginia**

- River Miles – 52, 225 miles (source VDEQ)
- Coastline - 132 miles (source VIMS)
- Tidal Shore – 7,213 miles (source VIMS)
- Inland Lakes – 116,364 acres (source VDEQ)

## **Incidents that are required to be reported to the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources**

- Damage over \$2,000 by or to the vessel or its equipment
- Injury requiring medical attention beyond first aid
- Loss of life
- Disappearance of any person from a vessel

## **2023 Virginia Boating Incident Summary \***

- **Number of Incidents = 59**
- **Number of Vessels Involved = 85**
- **Number of Injured Persons = 39**
- **Number of Fatalities = 8**
  - **Alcohol was a factor in 0% of fatal incidents \*\***
  - **Paddlecraft (canoes, kayaks, etc.) were involved in 38% of fatal incidents**
  - **In 63% of fatal incidents no life jacket was worn**
- **Property Damage = \$278,734**

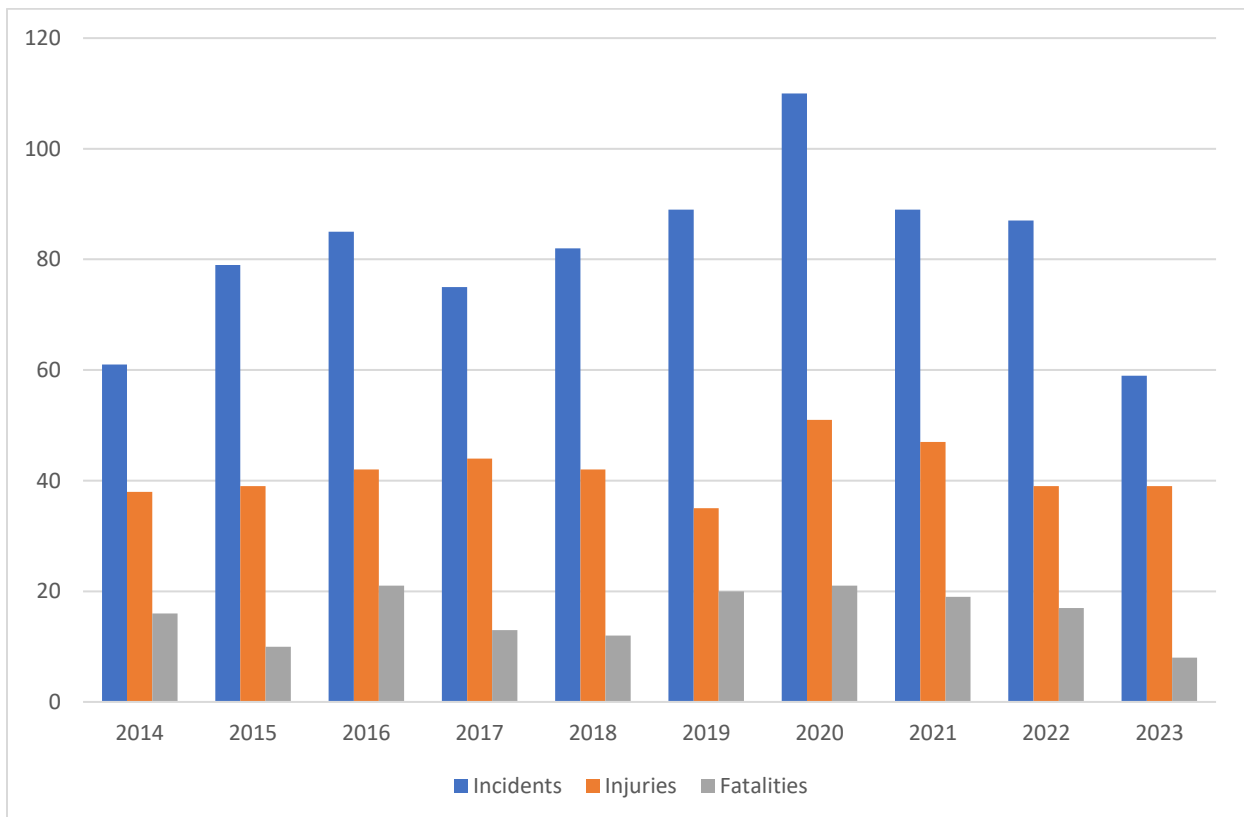
\*Reported to DWR

\*\*Primary, secondary, or tertiary

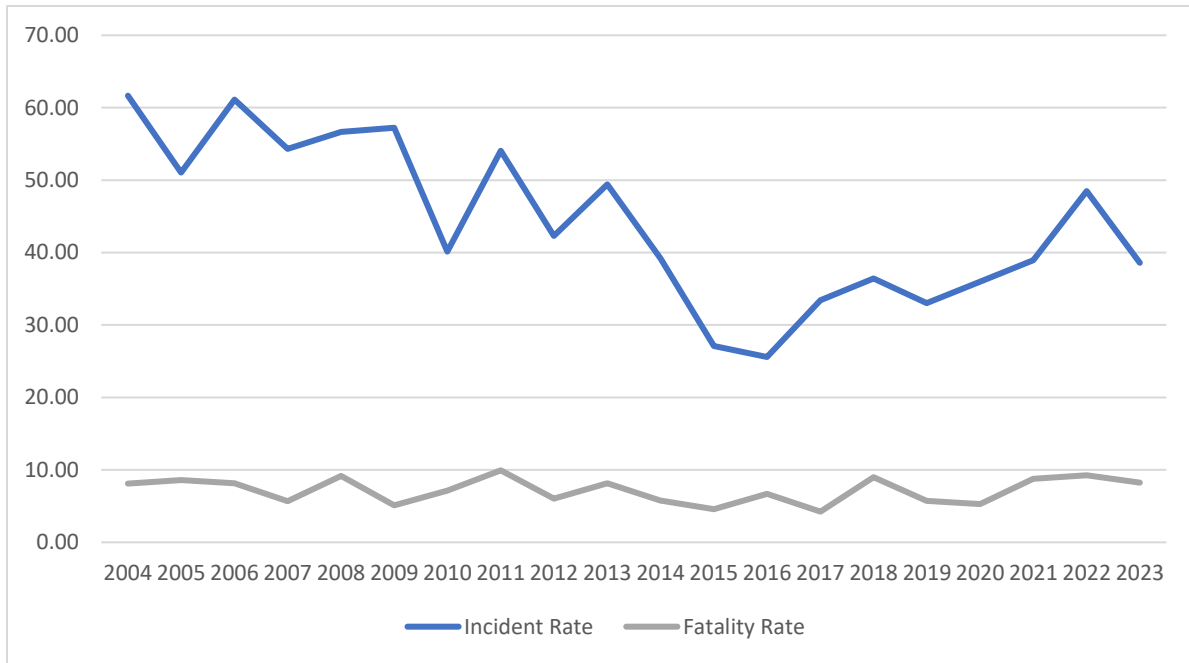
## 10 Year Boat Incident Summary

Year	Incidents	Injuries	Fatalities	Property Damage
2014	61	38	16	\$617,916
2015	79	39	10	\$441,301
2016	85	42	21	\$576,546
2017	75	44	13	\$308,160
2018	82	42	12	\$411,961
2019	89	35	20	\$572,456
2020	110	51	21	\$641,143
2021	89	47	19	\$624,887
2022	87	39	17	\$454,450
2023	59	39	8	\$278,734

## 10 Year Boat Incident Statistics



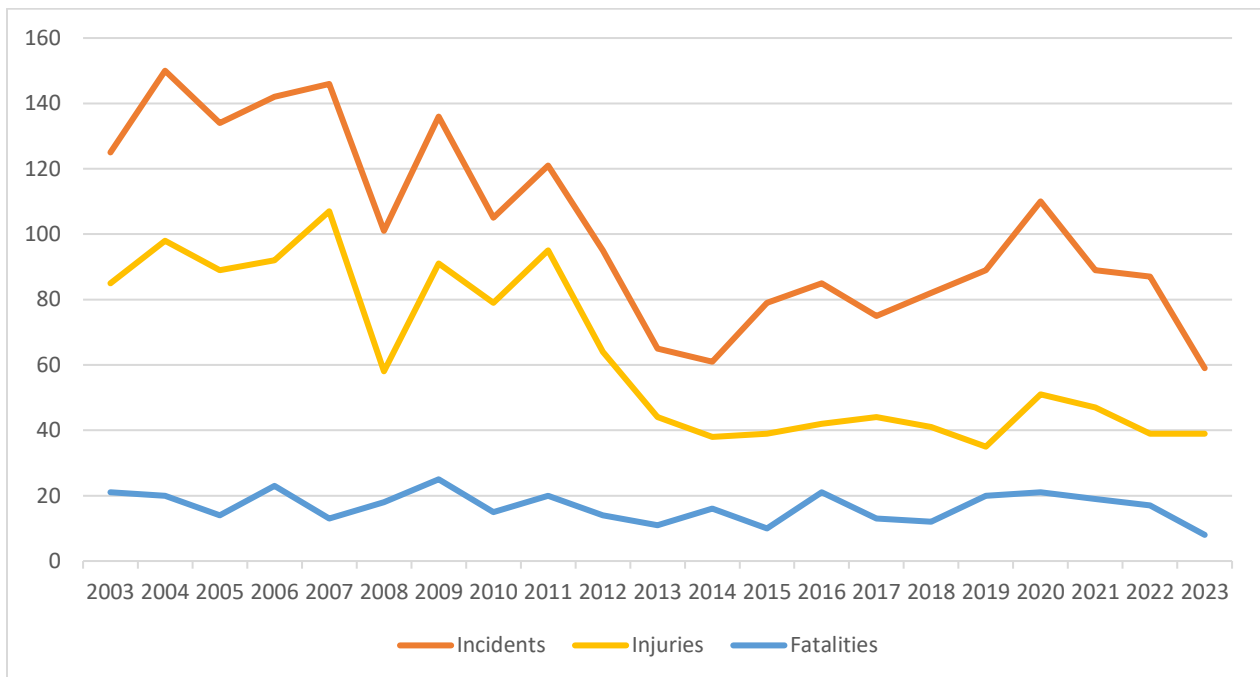
**Annual Recreational Boating Incident Rate\* 2004 – 2023 (per 100,000 Virginia Registered Boats)**



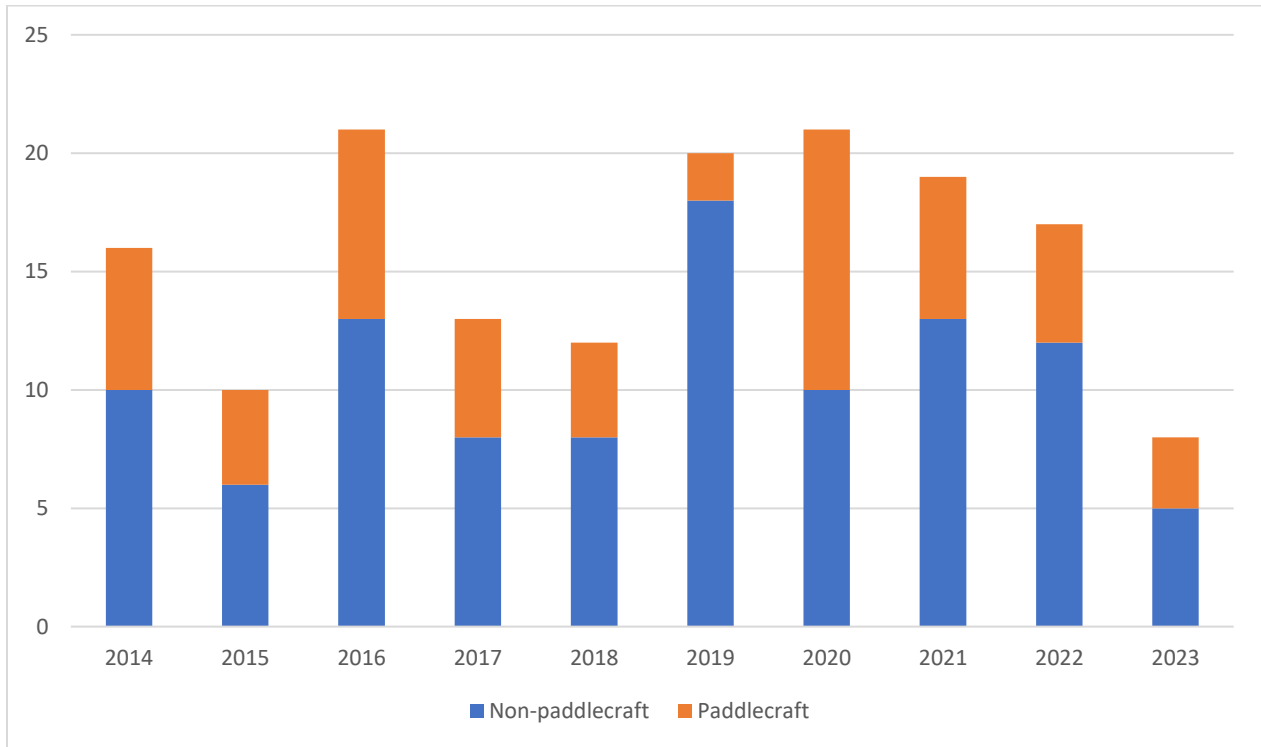
\*These rates include paddlecraft incidents/fatalities although paddlecraft are not registered in Virginia.

\*These rates include incidents/fatalities involving boats registered in another state that were involved in incidents on Virginia’s waters.

**Fatalities, Injuries, and Incidents by Year 2003 – 2023**



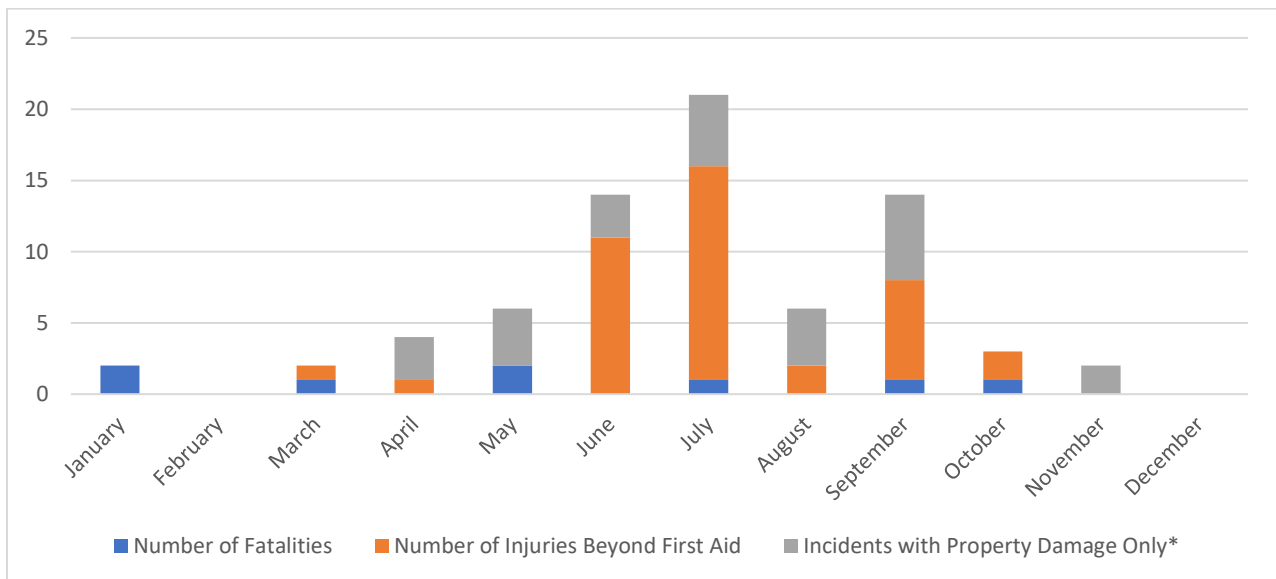
### Fatalities – Paddlecraft and Powered Vessels Last 10 Years



\*Non-paddlecraft includes motorized vessels, sailboats, & jon boats.

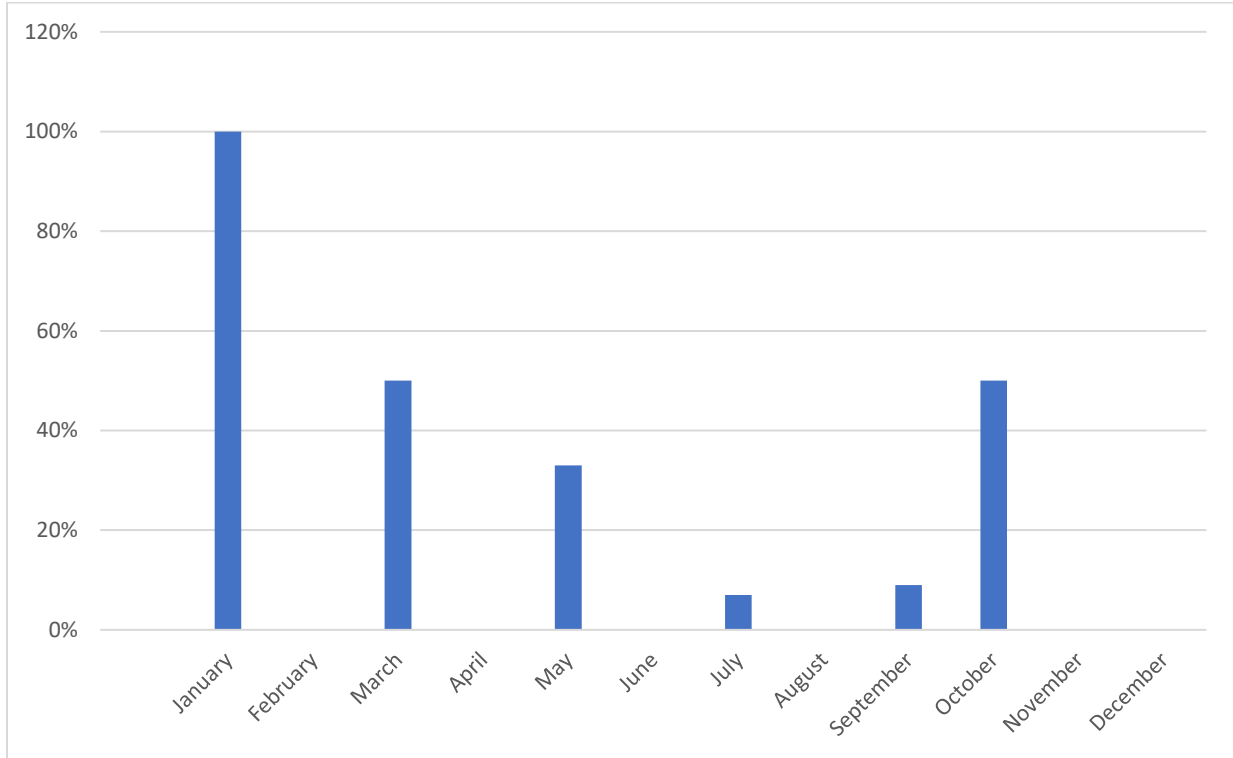
\*\*Paddlecraft includes canoes, kayaks, stand-up paddleboards, & catarafts.

### 2023 Boating Incidents and Fatalities – By Month

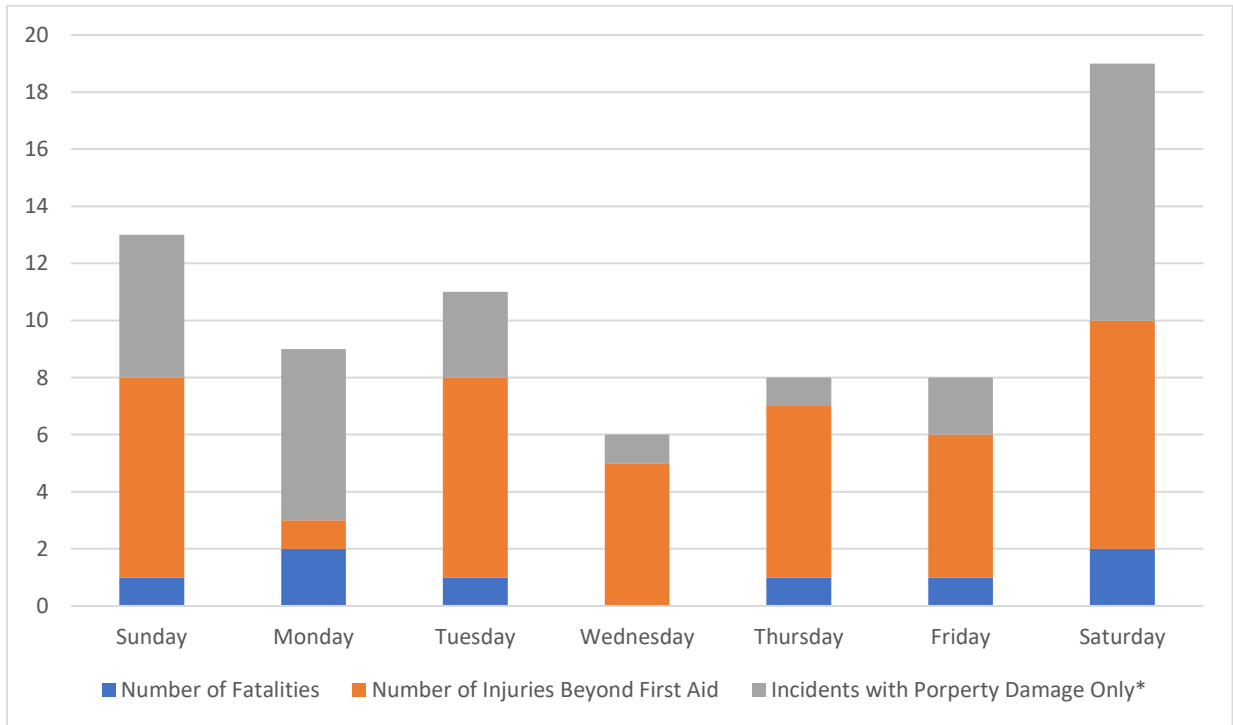


\*Including total loss of vessel.

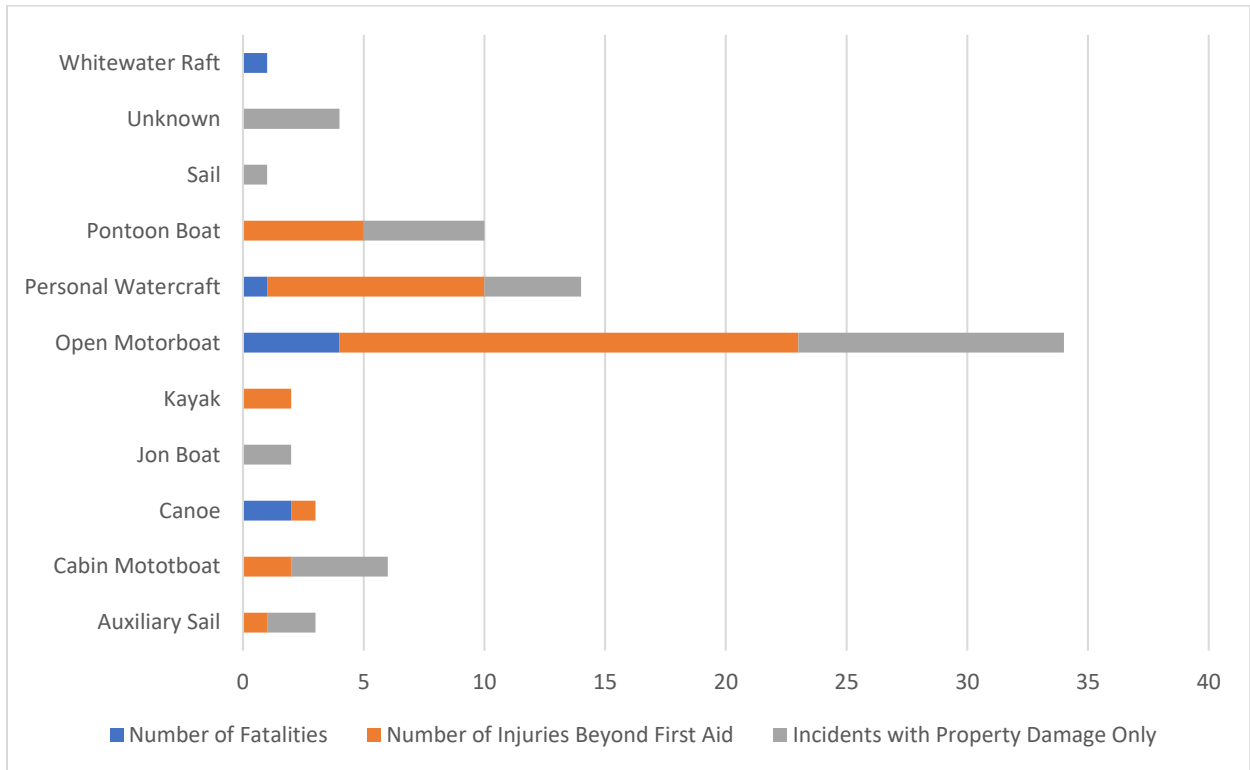
### 2023 Percentage of Incidents Each Month That Were Fatal



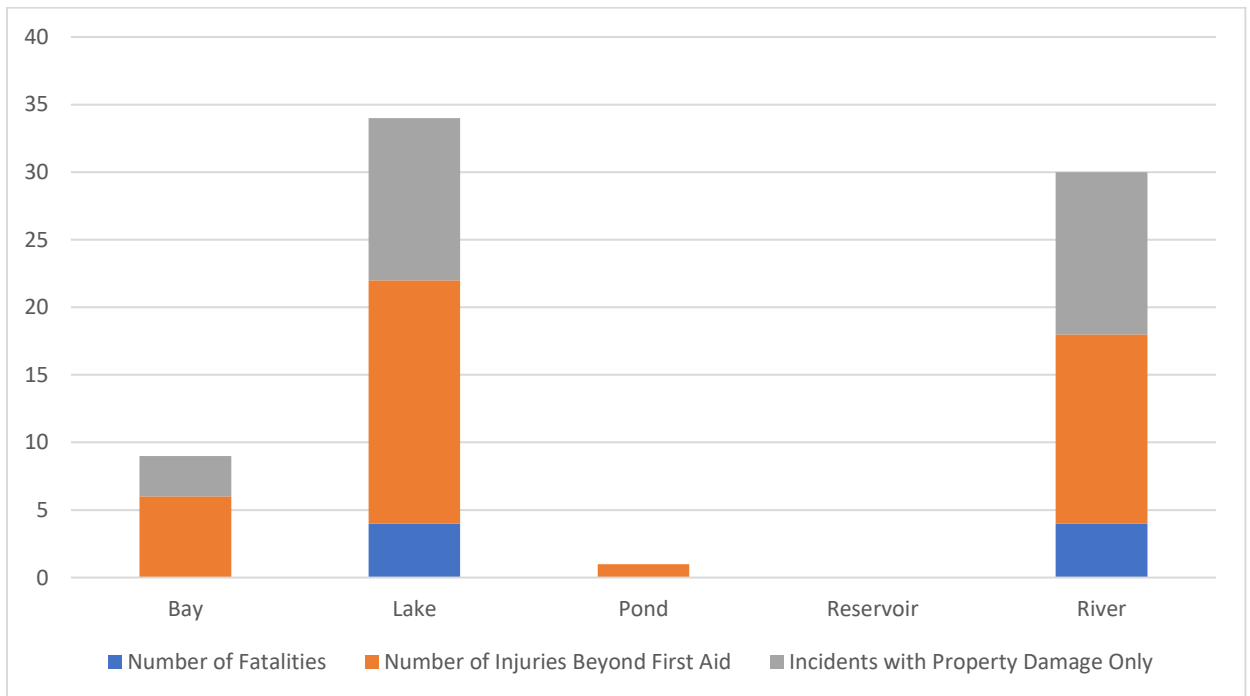
### 2023 Boating Incidents by Day of the Week



### 2023 Boating Incidents by Vessel Type

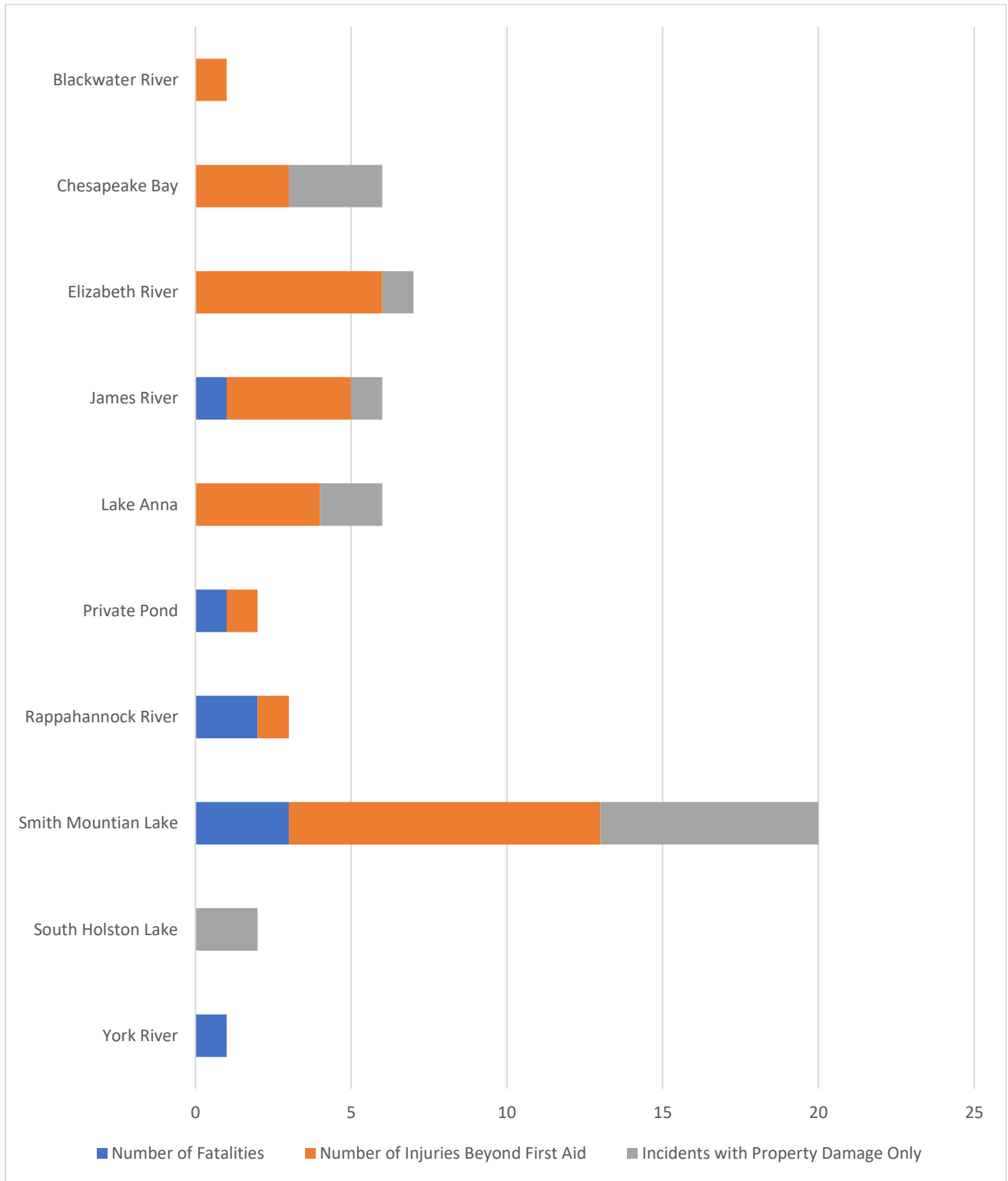


### 2023 Boating Incidents by Water Body Type

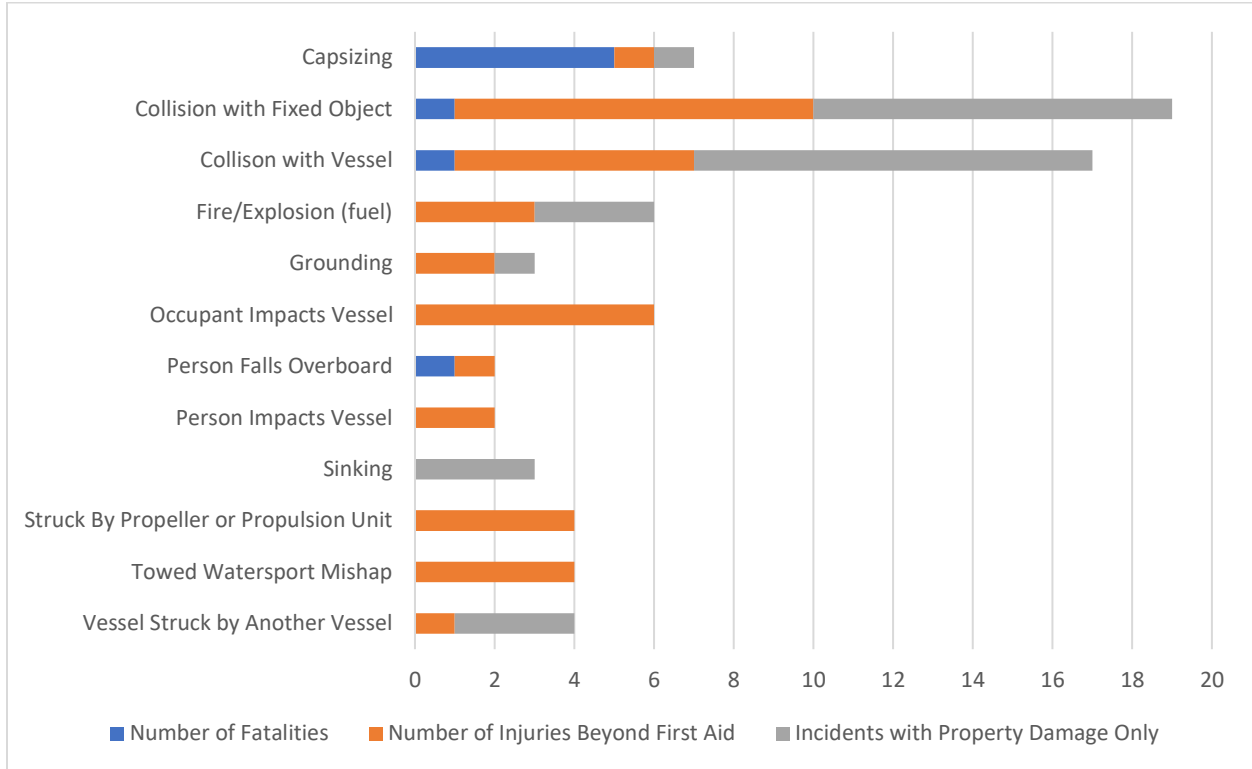




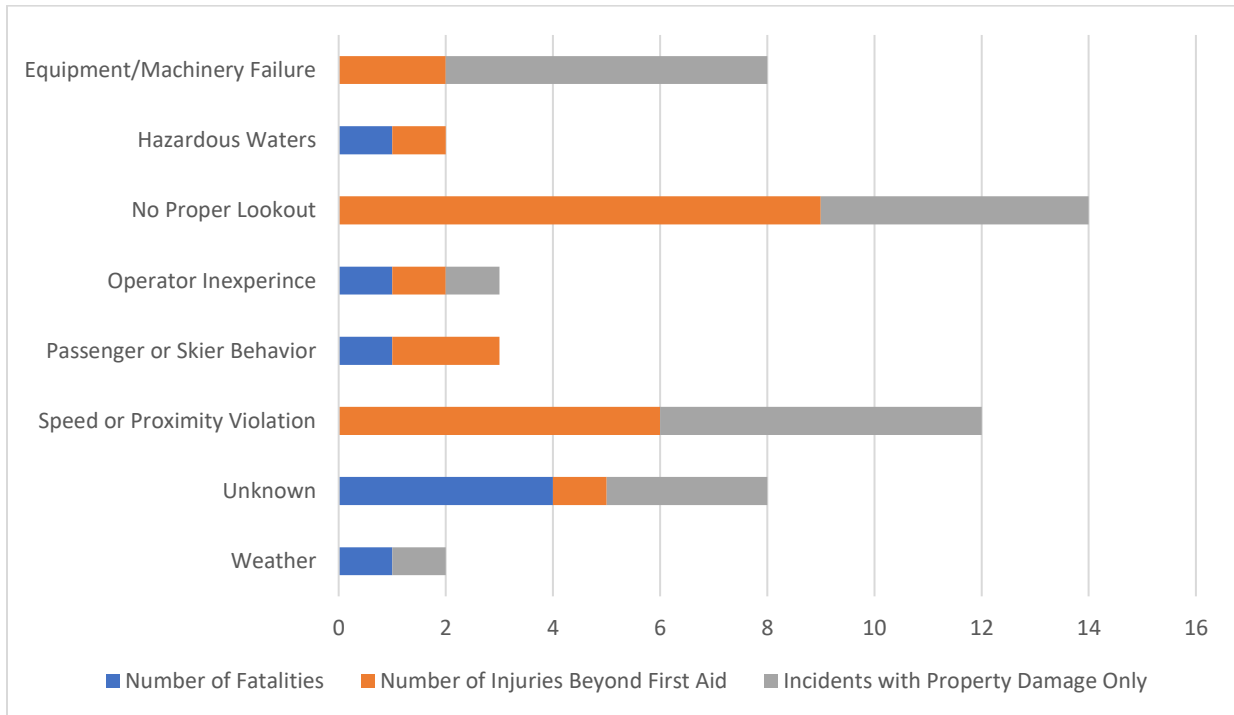
## 2023 Boating Incidents - Top 10 Locations



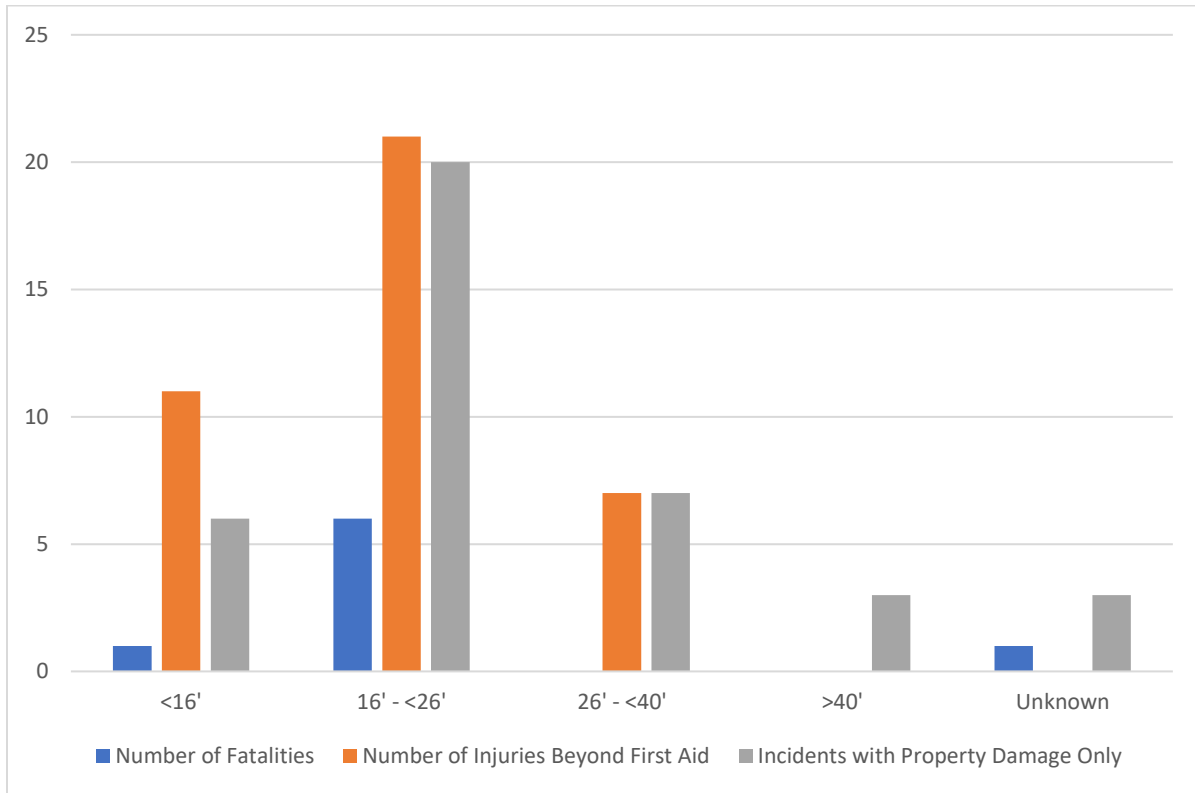
### 2023 Boating Incidents – Top Primary Incident Types



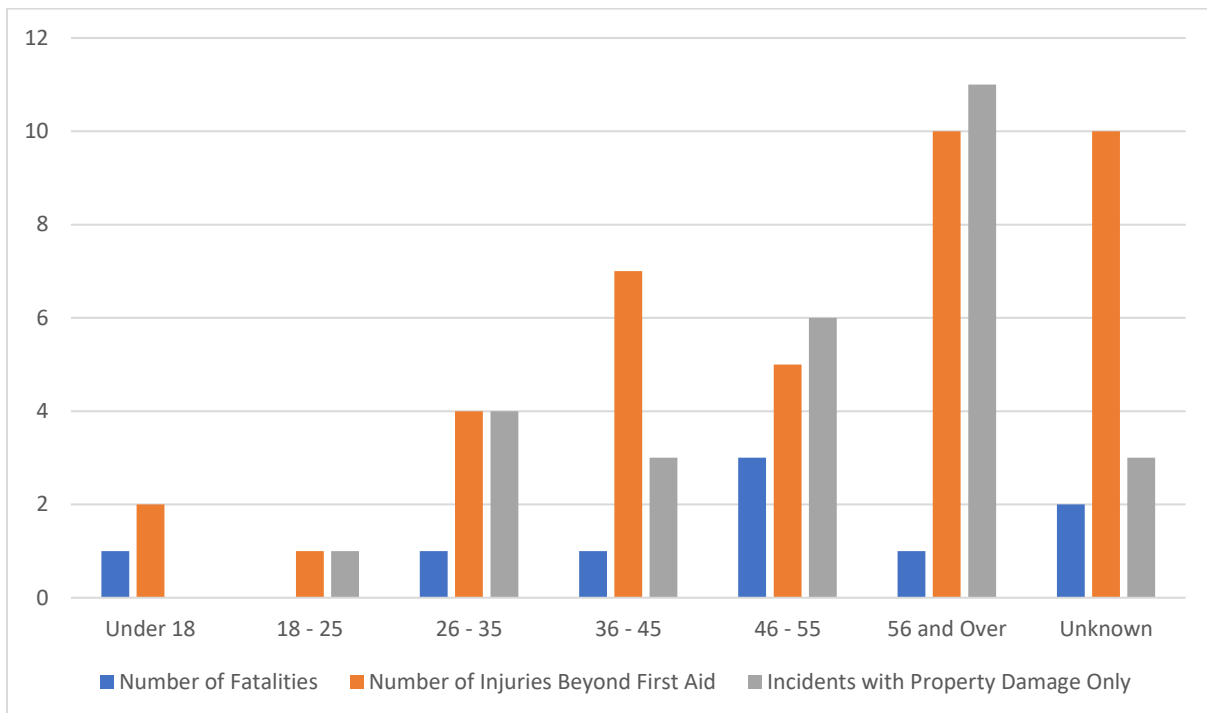
### 2023 Boating Incidents – Top Contributing Factors (by Category)



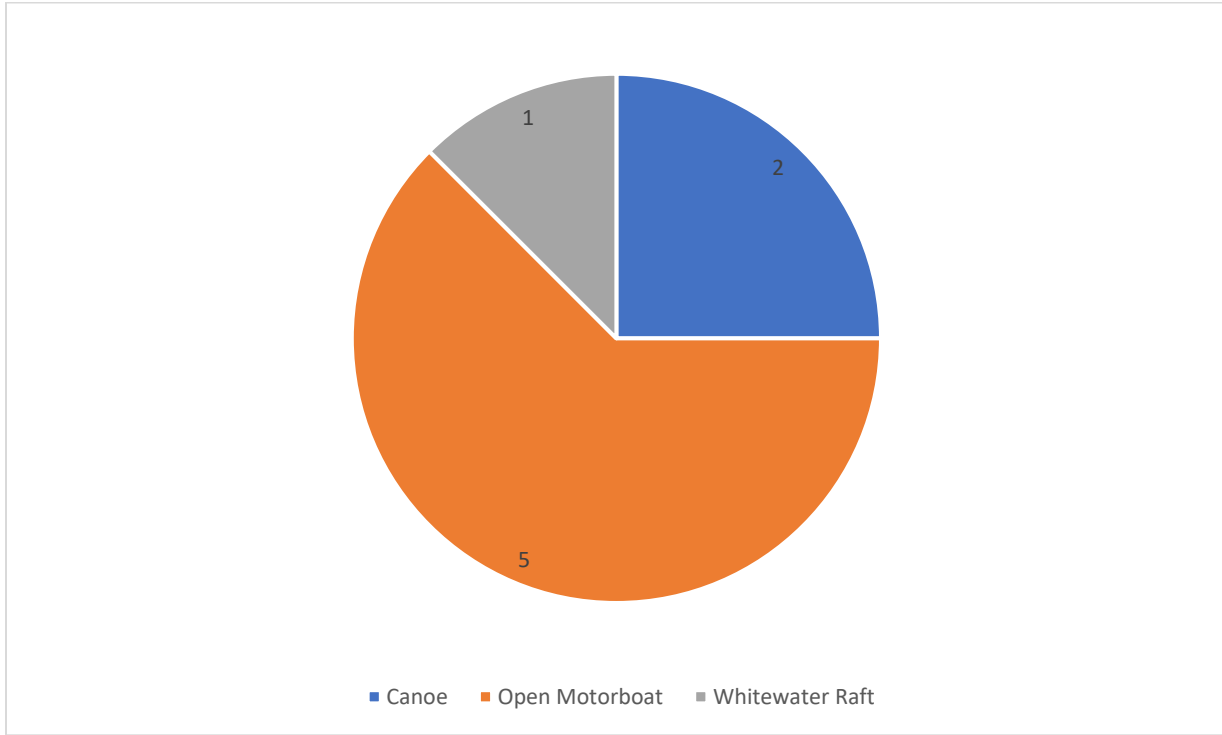
### 2023 Boating Incidents by Vessel Size



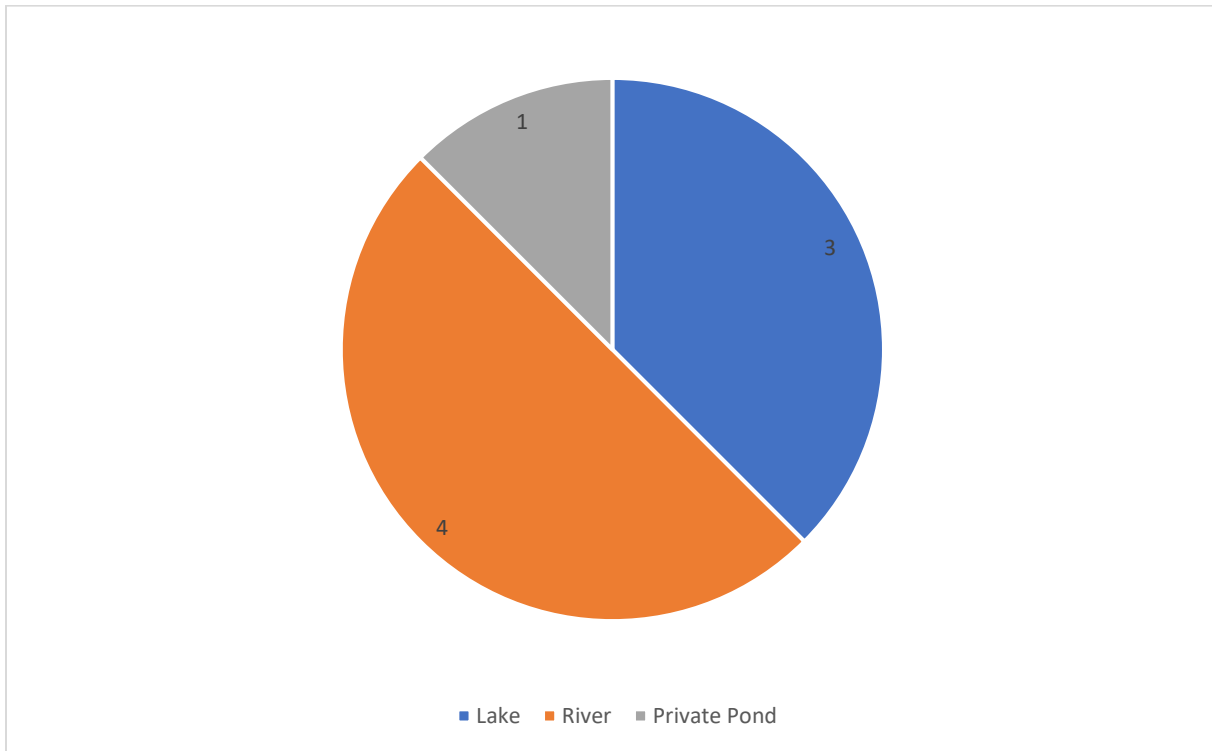
### 2023 Boat Incidents by Age of Operators



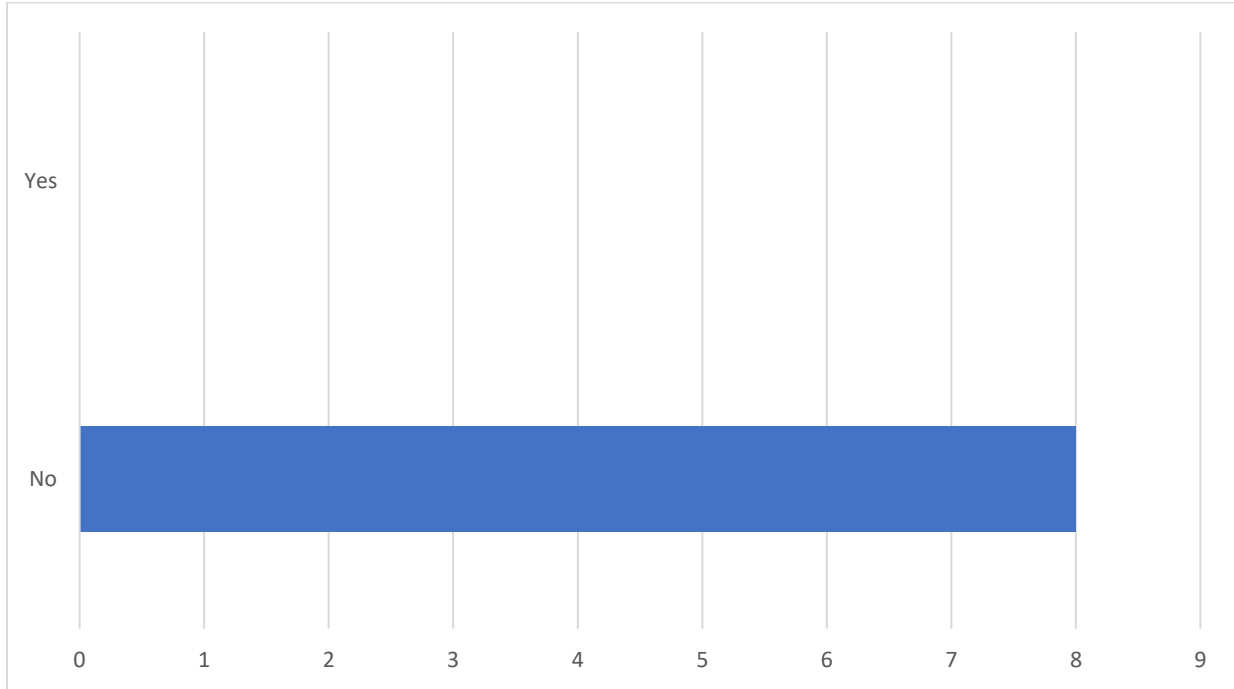
### 2023 Boating Fatalities by Vessel Type



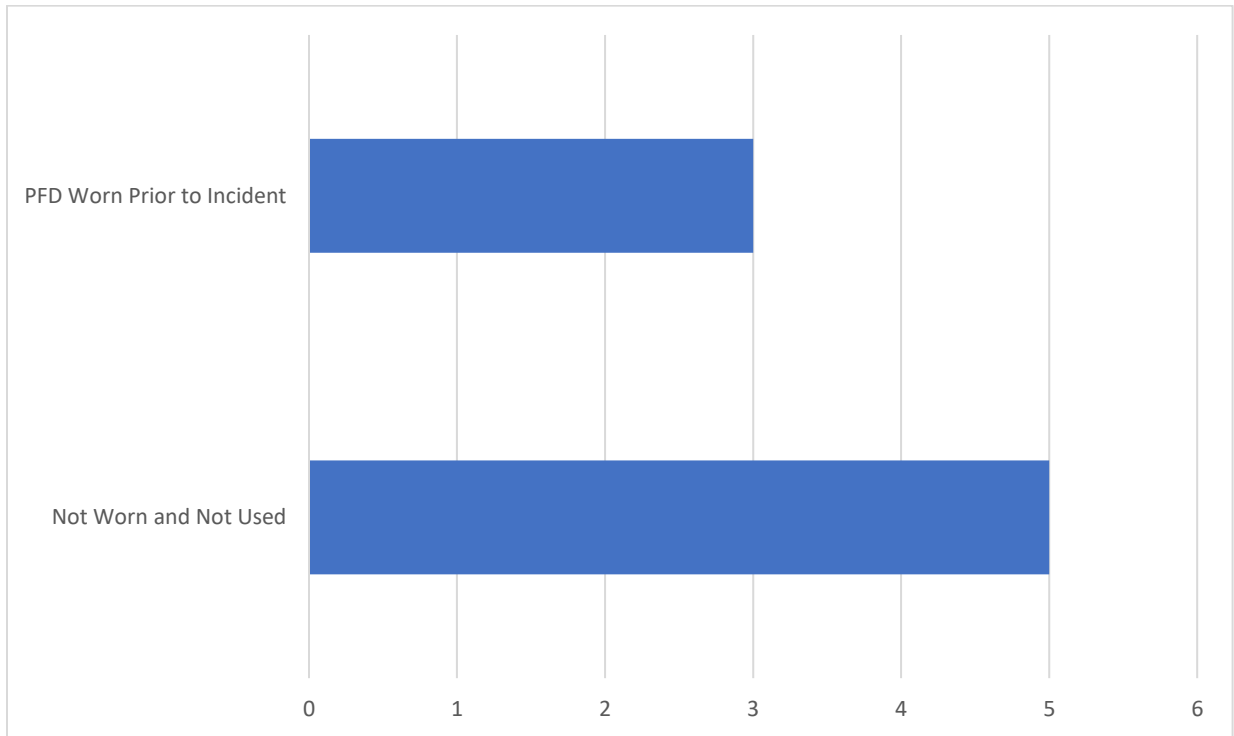
### 2023 Boating Fatalities by Waterbody Type



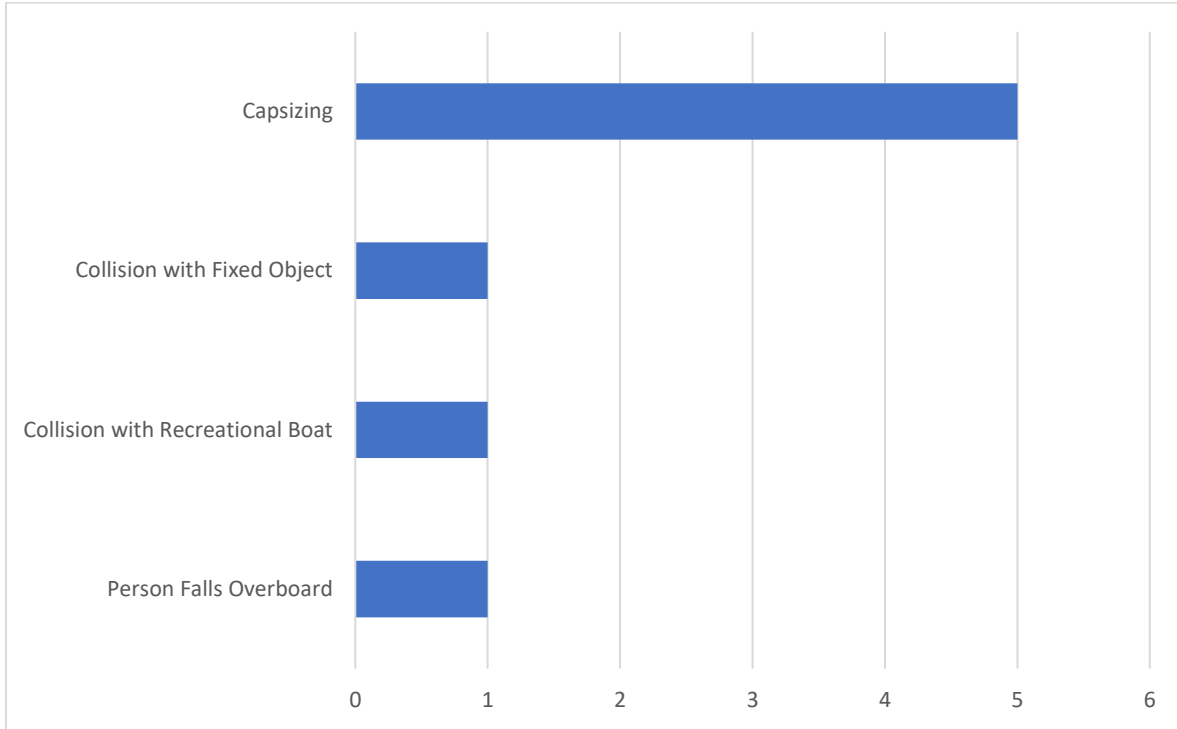
### 2023 Boating Fatalities – Alcohol/Drug Use



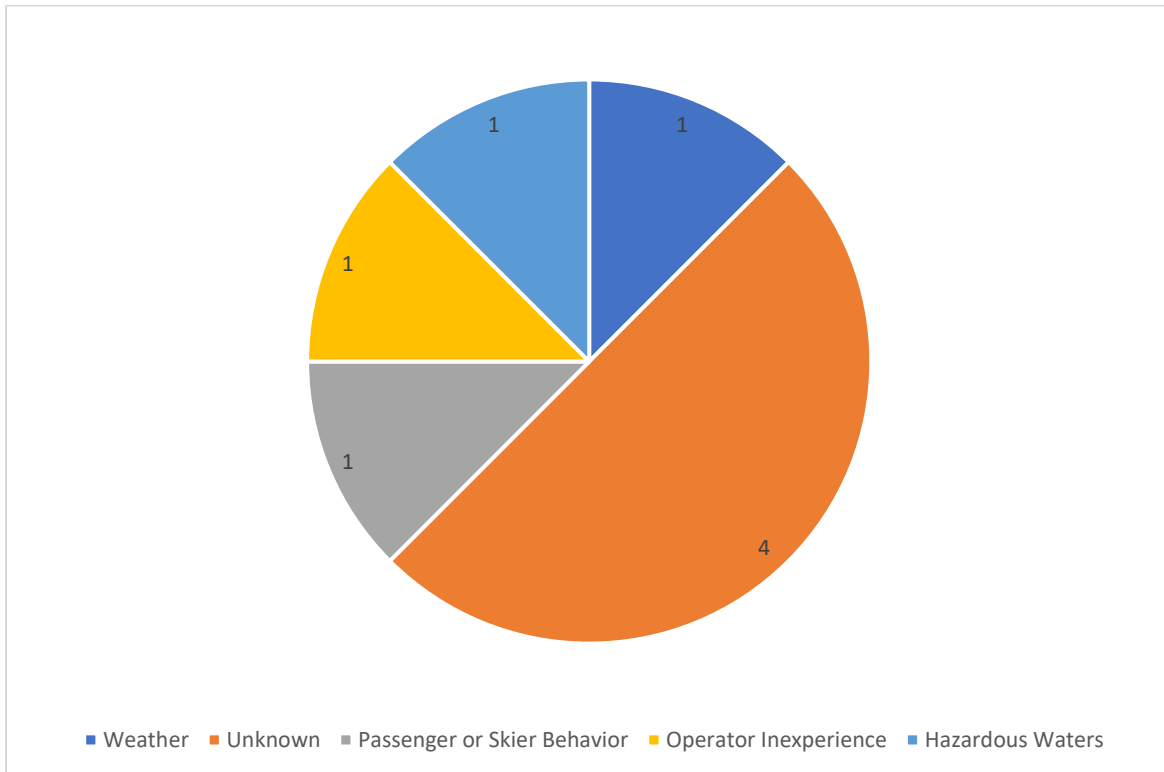
### 2023 Boating Fatalities – Life Jacket Use



### 2023 Boating Fatalities – Type of Incident



### 2023 Boating Fatalities – Cause of Incident



## **2023 Boating Fatalities Summaries**

01/02/2023 – Smith Mountain Lake, Pittsylvania County

A 16-foot open motorboat with two occupants (male, ages 20 & 21) was traveling north in a cove near Anthony Ford Boat Ramp on Smith Mountain Lake. The boat made a sharp turn and flipped several times. The two occupants climbed on top of the flipped boat. Witnesses told the two occupants to stay on the boat. Occupant 1 jumped into the water and started swimming. A few seconds later occupant 2 jumped into the water. Occupant 2 needed help, occupant 1 turned around and swam back to occupant 2. When occupant 1 arrived at occupant 2, both occupants went under water and never resurfaced. Officers unable to determine which occupant was operating vessel. Neither occupant was wearing a life jacket.

03/23/2023 – Rappahannock River, Essex County

The deceased (male age 71) entered the Rappahannock River in a canoe with his great grandson. They were joined by his grandson in a kayak. The tide and wind were pushing both vessels further away from shore and up the river. The grandson of the deceased returned to shore to get help for his grandfather. At some point the canoe capsized and the deceased was in the water. The granddaughter of the deceased went out into the river in another kayak to help her grandfather. The deceased was conscious and speaking to his granddaughter while holding onto the kayak. The deceased told his granddaughter he was cold and she could hear his teeth chattering. While she was trying to paddle back to shore, he got quiet and let go of the kayak. The granddaughter paddled back to her grandfather and held onto his personal flotation device to keep his face out of the water until help arrived. The deceased received CPR and was transported to Tappahannock Hospital where he was pronounced dead. It is believed the victims heart stopped due to the cold.

05/02/2023 – James River, City of Richmond

A whitewater raft with four occupants was navigating the rapids of the James River between Hollywood Cemetery and Belle Isle (Hollywood Rapids). The raft overturned when it hit a log throwing the deceased (female, age 26) and one other occupant from the raft. The other occupant flowed downriver to the right while the deceased went to the left. The group lost sight of the persons in the water and called 911. The deceased was located stuck in logs/debris and extracted. It is estimated that the deceased was under for more than 30 minutes. All four persons in the group were wearing personal flotation devices (PFDs) and helmets. The James River was at 9 ½ feet at the time of the incident.

05/20/2023 – Edwards Lake, Goochland County

A 15-foot canoe with two occupants was heading to shore when the vessel capsized. Occupants began swimming to shore. The deceased (male, age 46) called out to second occupant complaining of arm pain. Second occupant pulled the deceased up, let go, and then began swimming to shore. When second occupant reached shore, the deceased was no longer swimming or visible. The deceased was not wearing a life jacket.

07/30/2023 – York River, Gloucester County

A 24-foot pontoon boat and an 11-foot personal watercraft (PWC) were operating on parallel courses with the PWC overtaking. The PWC made a sudden starboard turn in front of the pontoon boat. This caused the PWC to impede the starboard bow of the pontoon boat with the starboard bow of the PWC. The pontoon boat ran over the PWC and the operator (male, age 16). The PWC operator received propeller strikes to the head and left shoulder and died because of those injuries. It is unable to be determined whether the PWC operator was wearing his safety lanyard due to it not being found on him or the PWC, along with lack of witnesses. The PWC operator was wearing a life jacket.

09/16/2023 – Smith Mountain Lake, Franklin County

A 22-foot open motorboat was traveling on Smith Mountain Lake in the area of R11 after dark, when the boat ran through a large amount of fallen trees that were on the shoreline. There was damage to the tree line for approximately 25 yards leading up to where the boat came to rest, suggesting that the boat went through 25 yards of fallen trees before stopping. There were two large trees on top of the boat when it came to a stop. The Operator (male, age 44) was pinned underneath the tree and died from injuries at the time of the incident. A passenger (female, age 40) suffered minor cuts and bruises, but was transferred to Franklin Memorial Hospital to be treated for injuries. Operator inattention and lack of proper lookout were determined to be the primary causes of the incident. Neither the deceased, nor the passenger was wearing a life jacket.



10/27/2023 – Rappahannock River, King George County

The operator of an 18-foot open motorboat was attempting to overtake vessel 200 yards upriver. The operator attempted to cross over wake, and during that the deceased (male, age 74), who was sitting on a camping chair in the bow of the boat, fell overboard. The operator and a second passenger recovered victim after he swam back to the boat. Despite being able to board into the boat, the deceased soon became unresponsive, and the operator beached the boat at a private ramp nearby. The operator, second passenger, and bystanders performed lifesaving measures until EMS arrived. The deceased was taken via ambulance to nearby hospital where he was pronounced dead. The Deceased was not wearing a life jacket.

### **2023 – Incident Summaries from Selected Boating Injuries**

06/24/2023 – Linkhorn Bay, Virginia Beach

A passenger, (male, age 22) was sitting on the bow (bow riding) of a 24-foot rented pontoon boat. Another occupant (female, age 22) walked forward to sit with him. While Getting into the seated position on the bow, the female slipped and fell off the bow and into the water. The male jumped off the bow and into the water in an attempt to save her. Both victims floated underneath the pontoon boat between the pontoons and were struck by the propeller. The vessel was traveling at 6 mph in a no wake zone at the Cavalier Yacht Club. Both victims had multiple lacerations from the propeller. Both were transported to Virginia Beach General Hospital for treatment and released. Neither occupant was wearing a life jacket.

06/28/2023 – Smith Mountain Lake, Bedford County

A fuel vapor explosion on a 26-foot open motorboat (Bayliner) resulted in burns to three passengers (females, age 16, 17, & unknown). None were wearing a life jacket.

07/04/2023 – Chesapeake Bay, Northampton County

A 22-foot open motorboat was underway on the Chesapeake Bay, outside the public beach area of Cape Charles, Virginia. As the vessel was traversing the waterway, toward the main channel west of the harbor, it impacted the rock jetty that extends from the public beach at Cape Charles. The vessel impacted the jetty causing the occupants on board to be knocked around in the boat, resulting in minor injuries to three passengers (female, age 34; male, age 30; male, age 5). There was notable damage to the bow and port side of the vessel.

07/20/2023 – Elizabeth River, City of Portsmouth

Henrico County Police boat (27-foot open motorboat) was participating in NASBLA Tactical Operators Course training. While maneuvering in a turn to starboard, the boat caught a chine causing passengers to move to port. Two of the passengers in the cabin received injuries; one (male, age 43) broke his back and one (male, age unknown) received a strain injury to his left wrist. One passenger (male, age 31) riding aft of the cabin was ejected and suffered a laceration to his right elbow. All were wearing life jackets.

07/22/2023 – Buggs Island Lake, Mecklenburg County

A 19-foot open motorboat was traveling down Buggs Island Lake, in the dark, when it struck a water intake pump station, square on. The passenger (male, age 59) and operator (male, age 71) were both injured. The passenger received a punctured lung and broken pelvis while the operator received severe facial fractures and an orbital socket fracture. Neither were wearing a life jacket.

09/01/2023 – James River, Chesterfield County

A 21-foot open motorboat was traveling at approximately 20-25 mph through the old bridge near Dutch Gap boat ramp while towing a broken-down jet ski on a 50' line. The operator attempted to turn for the curve in the river. The vessel started to turn, but then continued in a straight line. The operator attempted to throttle down, but the throttle control was stuck. The operator yelled at the occupants to, "Hit the deck." All occupants exempt for the operator (male, age 40) and co-captain (male, age 32) got in the floor of the vessel. The vessel struck a large tree on the bank. Both the operator and co-captain received impact injuries.

09/09/2023 – Elizabeth River, City of Chesapeake

A 28-foot open motorboat was underway on the Elizabeth River, just past the Gilmerton Bridge, where the channel takes a hard right in a blind corner. The boat was close to the green channel marker, when a cabin motorboat came around the corner on the incorrect side, coming at the open motorboat head on. The cabin motorboat never corrected his course as the navigation rules dictate and the open motorboat was forced to make evasive turn to the port side, as the shoreline prevented the boat from moving toward starboard side. Two victims in the open motorboat were injured - one (female, age 47) had bruises on her arm and near ribs, another (female, age 45) had a knee injury that required medical attention beyond basic first aid - when the open motorboat made the sharp turn to port.