

Charting A Course For A Summer Of Fun And Safe Boating

(NAPSA)—Last year more than 72 million Americans participated in recreational boating activities like fishing, cruising, skiing and wakeboarding. National Boat Safety Week, May 19-25, is just around the corner, and Mercury MerCruiser®, the world's leading sterndrive and inboard marine power manufacturer, and the National Safe Boating Council (NSBC) would like to remind boaters to "Boat Smart From The Start." By following a few easy rules, boating can be safe and enjoyable for everyone.

- Before the boat is even on the water, make sure it is in good running condition. Check the hull and engine thoroughly for any problems, and make sure the bilge is clean.

- Refamiliarize yourself with the operation and handling characteristics of your boat, as well as federal and state boating regulations.

- Be sure to have on hand the required number of life jackets or personal flotation devices (PFDs). In 1998, 8 out of every 10 victims in fatal boating accidents were not wearing life jackets. U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) regulations require that there is a properly sized life jacket in good condition for everyone onboard, and boats over 16 feet in length must also have at least one throwable life ring or cushion.

- Have at least one USCG-approved fire extinguisher, a first aid kit and horn on your boat. Flares, flashlights and whistles are also necessary if planning nighttime boating.

- Don't drink alcohol while oper-



ating a boat. Boating under the influence (BUI) of alcohol is illegal and endangers not only you and your passengers but other boaters and water sport enthusiasts as well. According to the USCG it only takes approximately one-third the alcohol that makes a person legally impaired on the road to make a person equally impaired on the water. BUI is all the more dangerous because recreational boaters spend much less time boating than driving, so they are often less skilled and confident on the water than on the road.

- Develop a float plan and share it with a responsible friend or relative who is staying onshore. A float plan has information about the boater, vessel and passengers, as well as specifics about the day's trip.

These simple safety measures can help make your day on the water safe and enjoyable and should any problems occur you would be better prepared to handle them. Once again, Mercury MerCruiser and the NSBC remind you to "Be Smart From The Start—Wear Your Life Jacket."