NOAA’s National Weather Service and the National Safe Boating Council (NSBC) have again come together to encourage recreational boaters to know their risks, learn the rules, and be prepared before taking the helm this summer during National Safe Boating Week from 19th to 25th May.

According to the US Coast Guard, there were more than 4,000 boating accidents, including 758 deaths, in 2011. Seventy percent of all fatal boating accident victims drowned, and of those, 84% were reported as not wearing a life jacket. Once in the water hypothermia can become a significant threat to survival even if wearing a life jacket.

To increase awareness about the dangers of hypothermia, the NSBC and NOAA have enlisted assistance from former college football player and boating tragedy survivor Nick Schuyler. Schuyler was the lone survivor of a boating accident while fishing off the Florida Gulf coast in February 2009. “Before going out on the water, check the marine weather forecast and then stay informed with NOAA Weather Radio,” said Dr Jack Hayes, Director, National Weather Service. He added, “We want boaters to be part of our weather-ready nation. Weather can change very quickly on the water. The sudden emergence of dark clouds, increasing winds, torrential downpours and lightning can turn a relaxing time on the water into a dangerous situation.”

NOAA and the NSBC have launched a series of boating safety public service announcements to highlight important boating safety topics, including hypothermia; the importance of always wearing a life jacket; distress radio beacons; winds and waves, thunderstorm safety; understanding your marine forecast; and boating under the influence.

Administered by NSBC the North American Safe Boating Campaign “Wear It!” is designed to educate boaters about the importance of life jacket wear while introducing them to the different styles that are available, including inflatable life jackets. “Wear It!” is produced under a grant from the Sports Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund, administered by the U.S. Coast Guard.

“Lives can be saved by improving the knowledge and skills of recreational boaters,” said Virgil Chambers, executive director, NSBC. “Boaters can have fun and stay safe by wearing a life jacket, having the proper equipment onboard, knowing what the weather conditions will be, and abstaining from alcohol while boating.”
Through its National Weather Service NOAA is dedicated to supplying the most up-to-date and accurate weather information throughout the US coast, coastal and offshore waters, the Great Lakes, and the open oceans. NOAA’s National Ocean Service provides the navigation services that protect lives, strengthen the maritime economy, and position America for the future. NOAA’s mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage US coastal and marine resources.