



# UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

## MARINE SAFETY ALERT

### *Inspections and Compliance Directorate*

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Washington, DC

Safety Alert 06-25-CH1

## **BOW SEATING SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS**

This Safety Alert addresses the safety considerations for captains and passengers seated in the bow area of bow rider style vessels, while the vessels are underway. A 23-foot bow rider style recreational vessel was underway and improperly loaded on the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway when it encountered a large wake created by another vessel ahead. The wake caused the bow rider to roll severely and pitch forward, swamping the bow. Nine of the occupants were washed out of the vessel. The passenger seated at the forwardmost bow seat was subsequently struck by the vessel's propeller and killed. A similar fatal accident occurred in July of 2022, when an overloaded 24-foot boat capsized while traveling at high speeds in the Hudson River off Manhattan with passengers seated in the bow area.



Swamping of the bow can happen quickly and without warning, even when a boat is loaded in compliance with the manufacturer's capacity plate. The captain's judgment is crucial in determining access to the bow area when the vessel is underway. The likelihood of the vessel experiencing unstable or erratic motion may increase with greater sea state, speed, and vessel loading conditions with passengers and gear at the bow. These circumstances, as well as individual passenger capabilities, should be considered when determining if the closure of the bow area is necessary.

The U.S. Coast Guard **strongly recommends** that operators of bow rider style vessels adhere to the manufacturer's occupancy limit for persons and maximum weight capacity as applicable, as well as designated recommended positions if available. If weather or sea conditions impact vessel operation, captains should relocate passengers from the bow seating area to aft seats while their vessels are underway.

The U.S. Coast Guard **strongly recommends** that manufacturers of bow rider style vessels take the following measures:

- Designate occupant positions for vessels operating above 5 mph and provide a label on the boat or in the owner's manual illustrating those positions on boats less than 26-feet in length.

- Establish an advisory of the hazards of using bow seats while the vessel is on plane, above 5 mph, or in rough conditions for boats less than 26-feet in length. This advisory should be posted on a label aboard the boats, as well as in the owner's manual.

The U.S. Coast Guard **strongly recommends** that the American Boat & Yacht Council (ABYC) take the following measures:

- Review H-5, *Boat Load Capacity* (2021) to evaluate if the standard should be updated to recommend that designated occupant positions be illustrated on a label aboard the boats, as well as in the owner's manual.
- Review S-32, *Warnings and Safety Signs for Boats* (2022) to evaluate if the standard should be updated to recommend a more specific advisory of the hazards of using bow seats while the vessel is operating above 5 mph. The data used in studies on warning labels to develop the current standard is nearly 18 years old. An updated study could provide insights on any evolving trends.

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