

**Admiral Thomas H. Collins**  
**American Boat & Yacht Council (ABYC) Annual Meeting**  
**11 February 2004**

**Introduction**

**Thank you for such a warm welcome. It's really a pleasure to be here with all of you, and I am honored to have the opportunity to speak with you for a few moments, especially in this wonderful setting.**

**It is fitting for the Coast Guard to celebrate with, and recognize ABYC, on its fiftieth anniversary, since your roots extend from a long-past association with the Coast Guard. As many of you know, ABYC was formed on February 1, 1954, by members of the Motorboat and Yacht Advisory Panel of the U.S. Coast Guard's Merchant Marine Council, in New York State. I am deeply grateful for your continuous dedication to that commitment ... and personally impressed and thankful for your change in venue ... especially at this time of year...**

**More importantly, I thank you for your tremendous efforts over the years to improve the safety of the boating**

**public on our waterways. Any success that we have had, has been due in large part to the continuing active partnership, among all of us who find ourselves in the same boat – not only among the boating industry – but among federal, state, and local governments, as well. Success in these programs is demonstrated by the fact that boating fatalities in 2002 were only 750 – well below half the all-time high of 1,754 in 1973 – while at the same time the number of boats has more than doubled. But one life lost is one too many.... and 750 lives lost, is maddening, when some simple initiatives I will explore in a few minutes, could cut that number in half.**

### **Boating Safety Program Highlights**

**As we all are too well aware, the Coast Guard's operations over the last two years have significantly exercised our military, multi-mission and maritime capabilities. It is a challenge to execute both homeland security and our traditional missions like recreational boating safety, but in all mission areas, I assure you we remain focused on performance-based results.**

**There are four components that make up the Coast Guard's maritime strategy to reduce safety and security risks. I am determined we will enhance our awareness, prevention, protection and response competencies by having the right authorities to optimize our missions, managing our capabilities to their utmost, expanding our capacities, and strengthening our partnerships. Strong partnerships are nothing new to the Coast Guard; we have been compelled over our 234-year history to eagerly anticipate and foster teamwork amongst like-minded folk ... those who are committed and dedicated to the lives and safety of their fellow human beings, as ABYC has so diligently and steadfastly demonstrated over the past 50 years.**

**Almost two decades after ABYC's formation, the Federal Boat Safety Act was passed, establishing the Coast Guard's Boating Safety Program. This Act authorized the Coast Guard to promulgate regulations prescribing minimum safety standards for the design of recreational boats. The regulations set by the Coast Guard were based on ABYC safety standards in effect at the time, thus establishing a close link between ABYC and the Coast Guard. These regulations have had a major impact on reducing current boating fatalities to less than half the level they were when the regulations were**

**implemented in 1973. Since the Recreational Boating Safety program began, we estimate that more than 29,000 lives have been saved as a result of the cooperative efforts of all the people and organizations involved in it. It is truly a partnership of which we can be proud. Let's give ourselves a hand .... Congratulations.**

**The Federal Boat Safety Act also established the National Boating Safety Advisory Council to advise the Coast Guard on boating safety issues, including potential regulatory action, and ABYC has been an active and valuable participant in the important Council meetings. As many of you know, the Council is comprised of seven state boating officials, seven representatives from boat and associated equipment manufacturers, and seven representatives from boating organizations and the general public. (As a matter of fact, several members of the Council are present in the audience.)**

**Over the years, the Council has guided the Coast Guard through many rulemaking actions, including mandatory carriage of wearable PFDs on all vessels for each person on board, mandatory PFD wear for children under thirteen years of age, and nationwide enforcement of Boating Under the Influence regulations (alcohol involvement in accidents decreased from more than 70% to 27%).**

**I am deeply appreciative of your partnering with us on several other programs initiated by the Boating Safety Program that have been instrumental in improving the safety level of recreational boats. For example,**

- The Coast Guard's boat compliance testing program, in which we purchase recreational boats on the open market and test them for safe powering, safe loading, and level flotation, has successfully identified hundreds of boat models over the years that did not comply with our safety regulations. At our request, ABYC recently assembled a team of experts to review the test procedures used in this program and you have recommended several modifications to update and clarify the test procedures.**
- The newly implemented Factory Visit Program, designed primarily to educate boat manufacturers on how to comply with the safety regulations, but also includes inspection of boats in production, has resulted in numerous recalls of non-compliant boats that otherwise would have remained in service. This program uses compliance guidelines developed by ABYC to help manufacturers understand and comply with the regulations.**

- **The Boating Safety Program has worked diligently to improve boater education and within the last few years has seen the adoption of National Boating Education Standards. All boating courses must meet these standards to be approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) and recognized by the Coast Guard. Since the adoption of the standards, we have gone from just a few states with mandatory education to 43 of the 56 states and territories having some form of mandatory boating safety education. In support, ABYC has developed training and education programs for technicians and mechanics that have greatly improved the servicing of recreational boats.**
- **Upon the recent identification of outdoor carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning as a problem on recreational boats, the Coast Guard took immediate steps to mitigate this problem through a houseboat recall, educational outreach efforts, and the fostering of technological developments. I am proud to highlight the fact that ABYC was one of the first partners to join us in this important effort. Although these efforts have mitigated the problem, we continue to work toward eliminating the problem completely. As many of you know, ABYC**

**received the meritorious public service award from the Coast Guard at last year's annual meeting in recognition of those efforts. In addition to continued work on CO-related issues, ABYC is also a valuable partner with the Coast Guard in tackling other safety topics such as flare disposal and propeller injuries.**

**As recreational boating continues to grow in the United States, along with our desire to reduce safety hazards, the Coast Guard is moving forward with the implementation of risk-based decision making. The Office of Boating Safety is using boating accident report data to assess the risks associated with recreational boating. In so doing, we have pinpointed certain areas that we should be concentrating on, and I ask for your thoughtful response and support as we identify several new initiatives to pursue.**

**Increase PFD wear:**

**We are exploring all ways to increase PFD wear with regulation as a possible last resort. Actually, we are sponsoring a PFD workshop at the Miami Boat Show on Friday, with the boating industry, to seek input from the**

**industry and our constituents on strategies to increase the PFD wear-rate on vessels under 21 ft LOA. We estimate that 85 percent of fatalities due to drowning occur on these smaller recreational vessels. Overall eight out of 10 drowning victims were not wearing lifejackets, and 442 boaters were lost. A recent study has revealed that the PFD wear-rate remains low (currently as low as four percent for adults on runabouts) and has not improved over the last five years, even with the extraordinary efforts to enhance PFD wear through media and public awareness campaigns. We believe that increasing the PFD wear-rate would potentially reduce fatalities by 51 percent and save up to 379 lives annually. Two non-regulatory strategies that have been identified include a campaign to educate the public on the PFD technology (i.e., inflatables) and work with the industry to include comfortable PFD's in the boat package at the time of sale of a boat.**

**Developing Maneuvering Standards:**

**A second challenge on which I need your help is the development of a maneuvering standard for recreational boats. The most reported types of accidents are collisions with other vessels. The most common types of boats involved are open**

**motorboats and personal watercraft, comprising 69% of all reported accidents. We have expanded our concern to all recreational vessels and are looking to you for help in determining the appropriate off-throttle maneuvering standard that could act as a significant deterrent to these collisions. ABYC has already assisted us in testing the maneuvering characteristics of several types of vessels and we look to your continued input and support as we move forward with regulatory action.**

**Improving Operator Efficiency:**

**Thirdly, among operators involved in reported boating accidents, an estimated 65% have never had boating safety instruction. I ask for your continued support in your communities to encourage the participation of boaters in the widely available variety of educational opportunities. Our ABC: America's Boating Course, is accessible on the Internet, on CD-Rom, and in the traditional classroom. As Admiral Loy used to say, "Preparation Equals Performance," and there's nothing I would like to see more of than an educated and prepared recreational boating public.**

**To accomplish these initiatives, the Coast Guard will need help from its many partners and I know that we can rely on ABYC to be at the forefront. Your work in developing, analyzing and maintaining industry consensus standards has been invaluable in the continued improvement of safe boating and has greatly complemented the work of the Coast Guard. Boating fatalities have been moving along a downward trend line since 1997, though the number of registered boats remains high. I challenge ABYC to expand the use of its standards to ensure that every boatbuilder selling boats in the U.S. is building boats in compliance with ABYC standards. I ask for your strong support of education; we estimate that increasing the proficiency of boat operators alone could potentially save 100 lives a year, as well as prevent 1,500 reported collisions accidents and 1,1000 injuries resulting from those collisions. And finally, I am pleading for good ideas on how to convince people to wear life jackets, how to design them so they are comfortable, and how to make it as natural to wear one as we wear our seat belts. Thank you for support, expertise and dedication, and keep up the good work for another 50 years!**