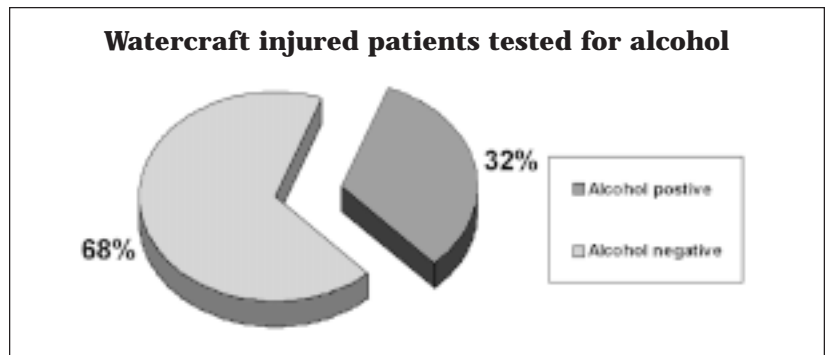

NTDB™ data points

“Water and alcohol don’t mix”

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Summer is in full swing, and in the Midwest that means that the best months for boating are here. Operating a boat on a lake or inland waterway is often a peaceful and relaxing venture. Unfortunately, recreational boating is not immune to human indiscretions. In order to take a boat out on the lake, all you need is the vehicle. There are no formal licensing processes, no testing requirements, no “rules of the road,” or any traffic signs. There is just a lot of water, sunshine, and plenty of cool beverages to be consumed.

Let’s take a closer look at the kinematics of watercraft injuries. For those persons who have not boated before, certain aspects often require a fair amount of skill. Take the process of docking a power boat. I liken that procedure to getting into a luxury automobile and pulling up alongside a guard rail. Slow the vehicle down to five miles per hour, and then place the shifter into neutral. You are now coasting in a 20,000 pound vessel without brakes while trying to rub up against the guard rail ever so slightly to slow down the boat’s momentum, while trying not to mar the arctic white fiberglass finish. The first mate will attempt to get off of the slow moving boat, assuming that it has been brought close enough to the dock, in order to place



the lines over the dock cleats to secure the boat. Now imagine this exercise after having consumed several alcoholic beverages. It is easy to see where torso crush injuries can occur.

Now let’s take the boat out of the marina and onto the lake. High speeds, endless water, the lack of proper safety gear, and the consumption of alcohol can be a formula for disaster. There are only a couple of thousand water craft injury records contained in the National Trauma Data Bank’s *Annual Report 2003*. But of those records tested, almost one-third had consumed alcohol. The results are depicted in the chart on this page.

According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *U.S. Coast Guard Boating Statistics Report*, over one-third of all boating fatalities involved the consumption of alcohol. Considered by some individuals to be

freak accidents, boating-related fatalities now rank second only to car crashes as the cause of transportation-related deaths in the U.S. More people die in boating accidents every year than in airplane crashes, train wrecks, or bus accidents.

As with “drinking and driving” responsibly, we need to make sure that we exhibit a high level of caution when consuming alcohol and venturing onto the three-fourths of the earth’s surface that is covered by water.

Throughout the year we will be highlighting these data through brief monthly reports in the *Bulletin*. For a complete copy of the National Trauma Data Bank *Annual Report 2000*, visit us online at our new Web address: <http://www.ntdb.org>. If you are interested in submitting your trauma center’s data, contact Melanie L. Neal, Manager, NTDB, at mneal@facs.org.