

YOU'RE IN COMMAND: The Genesis of a Campaign

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For some time it has been a goal of the Coast Guard's Office of Boating Safety (G-OPB) to unify its boating safety marketing and education programs under one multi-year outreach and awareness effort that would support the entire recreational boating community and provide the "tools" to make a difference on the water.

While recreational boating fatalities have been on the decline, there are still far too many deaths, injuries, and accidents on the nation's waterways. The initiatives we believe that could initially make the most difference -- include the Vessel Safety Check (VSC) program, innovative boating safety education courses like America's Boating Course (ABC), our national Boating Under the Influence (BUI) prevention program, efforts to increase rates of life jacket wear, and our continued targeting of anglers, hunters and small boat operators -- have not achieved the market penetration needed to create widespread behavior change.

Tremendous energy is expended by Coast Guard boating safety partners such as the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, the United States Power Squadrons®, the National Safe Boating Council, the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators, and the National Water Safety Congress. We are hoping that a unified outreach effort from our office will help channel this energy to greater use.

The Coast Guard's National Recreational Boating Safety Outreach Program officially began in September 2002, with the awarding of a contract to a Virginia based communications agency and the creation of a joint project team comprised of select members from the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, the United States Power Squadrons®, and the U.S. Coast Guard, initially focusing on the Vessel Safety Check Program and America's Boating Course.

The Situation

It was clear that not enough was known about the target audience for boating safety -- what motivates recreational boaters, where they get their information, and what they know or don't know about boating safety. Therefore, under the direction of the Coast Guard Office of Boating Safety, a marketing research effort was conducted in the fall of 2002. The results were telling.

The research revealed that most boaters believe that they are safe enough already. They equate boating safety with equipment -- like life jackets, fire extinguishers, and radios -- and not with their own behavior.

Additionally, recreational boating safety is suffering from "concept clutter." There is so much information, coming from so many different purveyors, that little is being retained.

The Umbrella Campaign

On the basis of this research, a powerful strategy to unite and leverage the messages of the National Recreational Boating Safety Outreach program and to enhance the on-going efforts of Operation BoatSmart partners was developed.

The goal is to "brand" boating safety -- to create a nationwide identification for the idea of boating safer -- and thus break through the over supply of boating safety information. The strategy is an umbrella campaign that brings together the disparate messages of recreational boating safety with the same kind of power that "Buckle Up for Safety" acquired for automotive seat belt wear and the "Food Pyramid" brought to healthy eating.

The campaign asks recreational boat operators and owners not only to boat safe -- but also to boat safer. It asks them to take new steps to ensure their own safety, and the safety of passengers and other boaters.

The message? *You're in Command. Boat Safely.*

You're in Command takes all previous outreach campaigns to the next level by empowering boaters to take action.

The Next Steps: Making *You're In Command* a Reality

The Office of Boating Safety is well into the process of producing a set of initial materials to promote the *You're In Command* campaign. The official rollout took place at the International Boating & Water Safety Summit, April 13-16, 2003 in Las Vegas, NV.

You're in Command was created to serve as the new "external" marketing campaign for boating safety. It "brands" boating safety and ties several diverse aspects of boating safety (boating under the influence, life jacket wear, boater education, vessel safety checks, etc.) under one "umbrella" marketing strategy. It will also serve to publicly promote the Four Principles of Safe Boating, initiated through the partnerships and energy created through Operation Boat Smart (OBS). OBS will continue as the Coast Guard's initiative to mobilize boating safety advocates to work along a common purpose in the education of the boating public. It will serve as the "internal" operating mechanism and communications tool within the coalition.

Of interest to all boating safety advocates will be a new section of the uscgboating.org website entitled the "You're In Command Resource Center." Here, boating safety supporters will be able to find an expanding variety of tools, resources, images, and downloadable files to help promote *You're In Command*, VSC, ABC, BUI, life jacket wear, paddle sport safety, and other boating safety topics.

We are also making great strides toward promoting the program through media relations and coalitions with manufacturers, dealers, other boating, hunting, angling, and outdoors interest groups, and associated industries. You can expect to see articles, PSAs, and features branded with *You're In Command* -- first in Coast Guard Auxiliary, Power Squadron, National Safe Boating Council, National Water Safety Congress and NASBLA publications, then later in the trade and general press.

The Role of Partners

You're In Command -- and the National Recreational Boating Safety Outreach program itself -- will depend heavily upon the partnership and support of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, United States Power Squadrons, NASBLA, National Safe Boating Council, National Water Safety Congress and other boating safety organizations. These groups represent a huge network of dedicated and enthusiastic boating safety proponents who will now have access to some of the tools, resources, and national publicity we have needed to accomplish our goals.

The Office of Boating Safety looks forward to working with the boating safety community throughout the "*You're In Command*" campaign. The energy, effort, and connections of the nation's premier volunteer boating safety organizations will be invaluable in the Coast Guard's effort to change the behavior of recreational boaters, reduce accidents, and save lives on the nation's waterways.

