Boat Strikes Meeting Kit



WHAT’S AT STAKE

Boat strikes refer to collisions or impacts between boats or vessels and marine animals, such as whales, dolphins, manatees, sea turtles, and other species. These incidents occur when a boat comes into contact with a marine animal either directly or through its propellers.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

HAZARDS AND DANGERS ASSOCIATED WITH BOAT STRIKES

- **Spread of diseases:** When a boat strikes an injured or sick animal, there is a potential for pathogens or bacteria present in the animal’s blood or tissues to contaminate the water or come into contact with humans.
- **Damage to underwater structures:** Boat strikes can cause damage to underwater structures such as coral reefs, seagrass beds, and submerged archaeological sites. Collisions with boats can break or displace corals, disrupt seagrass habitats, or disturb sensitive archaeological artifacts.
- **Water pollution:** Boat strikes can result in water pollution through the release of fuel, oil, or other hazardous substances carried by the vessel.
- **Injury or death of marine animals:** Boat strikes can cause severe injuries or fatalities to marine animals, including whales, dolphins, manatees, sea turtles, and other species.
- **Disturbance of natural behaviors:** When boats approach marine animals too closely or strike them, it can disrupt their natural behaviors such as feeding, mating, nursing, or migration.
- **Population decline:** Since many marine animals have low reproductive rates and slow population growth, even a few individual deaths due to boat strikes can significantly impact the overall population.
- **Noise pollution:** Increased boat traffic in sensitive areas can create chronic noise pollution, altering the behavior and physiology of marine animals, including stress responses, and changes in vocalization patterns.
- **Climate change implications**: By disrupting the natural behaviors, reproduction, and migration patterns of marine animals, boat strikes can hinder their ability to adapt to changing environmental conditions.
- **Damage to boats and property:** Colliding with a large marine animal can cause significant damage to the boat’s hull, propellers, or other

equipment, leading to expensive repairs or vessel loss.
- **Human injuries:** Large marine animals, as whales causes significant damage to boats and harm individuals.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

BEST PROTECTIVE MEASURES TO AVOID BOAT STRIKES

Maintain a safe speed: Operate your boat at a safe speed, in areas known to have marine wildlife.

Be vigilant and observe your surroundings: Keep a lookout for signs of marine animals, such as blows, fins, or other visible cues. Scan the water ahead and around your boat regularly.

Follow designated channels and routes: Stick to marked channels and established waterways to minimize the risk of encountering marine animals in high-traffic areas.

Maintain a safe distance: Keep a safe distance from marine animals. A general guideline is to stay at least 100 yards (approximately 91 meters) away from marine mammals and avoid approaching them directly.

Use caution during low visibility: Exercise extra caution and reduce your speed when visibility is limited due to fog, darkness, or adverse weather conditions.

Educate yourself and others: Stay informed about local regulations, guidelines, and best practices regarding boating in areas with marine wildlife.

Use technology and aids: Utilize radar systems, depth finders, and other navigation technology to help detect underwater hazards and potential marine animal activity.

Support conservation efforts: Contribute to marine conservation efforts by supporting organizations that work to protect marine wildlife and their habitats.

Wear life jackets: Always wear a properly fitted and Coast Guard-approved life jacket or personal flotation device (PFD) while on board. Ensure that all passengers have access to appropriate flotation devices.

Take a boating safety course: Training can significantly improve ability to navigate and respond.

Maintain your boat: Check the engine, fuel systems, steering, lights, before heading out.

Use navigation lights: Ensure that your boat is equipped with the required navigation lights and use them appropriately, especially during low-light conditions or at night.

Watch the weather: Stay informed about weather conditions before and during your boating trip.

File a float plan: Inform a responsible person about your boating itinerary,

including your destination, expected time of return, and contact information.

Use proper lighting and signaling devices: Carry and use signaling devices such as flares, whistles, air horns, and distress signals to attract attention and signal for help in case of an emergency.

Avoid alcohol and drugs: Impairment, increases the risk of accidents and boat strikes.

Be prepared for emergencies: Keep a well-stocked and accessible emergency kit on board that includes first aid supplies, a fire extinguisher, a throwable flotation device, a working flashlight, and a VHF radio.

Use lookout stations: Assign dedicated individuals on your boat as lookout stations.

Slow down in known areas of marine activity: Reduce your speed and exercise extra caution when entering or navigating through areas known to have high marine animal activity.

Establish exclusion zones: Consider establishing voluntary exclusion zones around sensitive habitats or areas with high concentrations of marine wildlife.

Use propeller guards: Install propeller guards or cages around the boat’s propellers.

Deploy acoustic deterrents: Some boats and vessels are equipped with acoustic deterrent devices that emit underwater sounds or signals to deter marine animals from approaching.

Support research and monitoring efforts: Contribute to programs studying marine animal behavior.

Participate in citizen science initiatives: Engage in citizen science initiatives that involve reporting sightings of marine animals, particularly those that are at risk of boat strikes.

FINAL WORD

Protecting yourself against boat strikes is not just about your safety but also about safeguarding the well-being of marine animals and their habitats.