

# Boating tests leave operators foundering

Federal officials say they are beefing up testing requirements for recreational boaters later this fall, but at least one transportation critic says the changes barely make a splash.

Recreational boaters are currently required to have a pleasure craft operator card. In order to get the card, they have to pass a 36-question, multiple-choice test online or in person through an accredited test provider.

Transport Canada officials said Tuesday they are planning to make the tests more rigorous by developing the questions themselves. Currently, private test providers write the questions.

Also, Transport Canada is planning to require all online exam takers to review a preparatory study guide before taking the exam. Right now, someone can take a stab at the test without having read course materials.

"The main objective of the program is to have more knowledgeable boaters through education and training, thereby reducing the number and severity of boating-related incidents on our waterways," said Melanie Quesnel, a Transport Canada spokeswoman, in an email.

But Liberal transportation critic Joe Volpe said Tuesday that there's still a big gap in testing.

Just as you need to take a road test in order to drive a car, there needs to be an on-the-water test to operate a boat, Volpe said.

"There's no independent assessment whether I have any competence. We need to reassess the entire program," he said. "If you want to ensure safety, you have to make an investment in something serious."

Volpe also questioned if it's wise to allow people to take tests online, since there's nothing stopping someone from getting a friend to help with the exam.

James Kusie, a spokesman for Transport Minister John Baird, said the department is constantly reviewing suggestions to improve testing and has "no plans to do on-water testing."

Investigators in B.C. are still trying to figure out what caused the driver of a speedboat to plow into a houseboat on Shuswap Lake over the weekend.

A 53-year-old man was killed and several others were injured

— **Canwest News Service**



John Lait (left) of the Canadian Red Cross and Dr. Ian Pike of 'Preventable' spread the message at Kitsilano Beach. JON MURRAY PHOTOS — PNG

# Have fun, but stay safe

**B.C. CAMPAIGN:** Knowledge, vigilance help prevent annual water fatalities

## Preventable

- Make sure that children are well supervised at all times, and that young children are within arm's reach.

- Ensure that pools have a four-sided fence and a self-latching gate.

- Remove toys near water or pool's edge that could tempt kids.

- Get First Aid or CPR training and enrol your child and yourself in swimming lessons.

- Be cautious about swimming in currents.

- Make sure a First Aid kit and phone are close at hand near water.

- When boating, ensure everyone in the boat has their own properly-fitted and fastened life-jacket.

- Don't consume alcohol before or during swimming or boating activities.

— **Courtesy of Preventable**

BY YOLANDE COLE  
STAFF REPORTER

As summer arrives in Vancouver, organizers of a new awareness campaign are sending a sober reminder to beach-goers about the risks of drowning.

Preventable, a B.C. organization, will be laying out towels at Kitsilano Beach this month with the inscription, "You're probably not expecting to drown today."

The blunt message is intended to raise awareness of the preventive measures that can be taken to avoid drownings.

According to Preventable, about five people a month, or 60 a year, die in B.C. from drowning — half of those are children and youth.

"We're reminding people that they ought to come down to the beach, have great fun, head out into the water, play around in the boats — but do that with an attitude that . . . things could go wrong," said Dr. Ian Pike, a spokesman for Preventable and the director of the B.C. injury research and prevention unit at B.C. Children's Hospital.

The most important way to mitigate the risks, said Pike, is to supervise children closely at all times. "Lifeguards are here to certainly assist and to remind people of water safety rules, but there is no measure of protection greater than parents watching out for their own children, and



Dr. Ian Pike launches campaign for water safety.

## What do you think?

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people watching out for themselves."

According to Pike, seven out of 10 drowning deaths among children can be prevented with a four-sided fence around backyard pools and a latching gate. More than half of drownings among

newborn to four-year-olds occur in the bathtub, which he said can be prevented through close parental supervision.

John Lait, a water safety instructor trainer with the Red Cross, said it's also important for parents to enrol children in swimming lessons and to take CPR courses.

Refrain from consuming alcohol while going into the water or operating boats or personal water craft. Almost half of boat-related incidents involve alcohol, he said. Be aware of currents, tides, waves and sudden drops in the ground.

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