Canadian Safe Boating Council
Conseil canadien de la sécurité nautique

COFFEE & CHALLENGES SESSION

CSBC 2024 SYMPOSIUM – *MANY PARTNERS, ONE GOAL*

Introduction

For a 2nd year, the Coffee & Challenges (C&C) session was incorporated in the Symposium program in order to provide an opportunity for delegates to exchange ideas; specifically, with regard to the following questions:

- Issues and challenges to optimizing safe and responsible recreational boating?
- Collaborative approaches that might be used to remedy these challenges?
- Further obstacles to making these partnership approaches a reality and how to overcome them?

The 60 or so delegates were divided randomly into 5 groups and tasked with answering the above. At the end of the session, a spokesperson reported his/her group's top line recommendations or suggestions. Each group's scribe also provided somewhat more detailed notes.

The far-ranging recommendations provided form the basis of this short report. Some were more frequently mentioned, others are perhaps outliers but still worthy of mention. Which should be further investigated is not the objective of this report but would be the subject of further discussion.

It should be understood that a certain degree of literary license was exercised when digesting the materials submitted and when piecing together the variety of recommendations and comments contained therein. Nonetheless, it is hoped that this report provides fuel for further thought and deliberations.

Key issues and challenges to optimizing safe and responsible recreational boating?

- A dominant theme may perhaps be summarized as boaters' attitudes with regard to safety, their perception of risk, and their subsequent behaviour. Looked at in another fashion, and not wishing to oversimplify the matter, it comes down to, on the one hand, the desire of proponents of safety to promote the risk message and on the other, boaters' desire to enjoy the freedom of boating and not be constrained by regulations.
- With that as a backdrop, it was suggested that the challenge therefore is to identify all relevant target groups and how to connect with them. (However, it was not clear whether "target groups" referred to the organizations and channels through which one ultimately connects with the "end" and ultimate audience (the boater), or the diverse groups making up that audience itself).

- An inherent challenge when tackling attitudes or risk perception is a perceived lack of appropriate data to substantiate the “risk” message. Also, there is a perceived lack of coordination of efforts among the key proponents of safe recreational boating. Further constraining educational efforts and behaviour change initiatives is the slowness with which legislation is enacted and regulations put in place. And yes, mandatory wear was mentioned.
- Not dwelled upon as much but doubtlessly important is the lack of – and need for – education and communications regarding safety gear and specifications, and how to use gear properly. In this context, it was noted that there is not enough education of children. Furthermore, pop-up rental outfits and what they do – or don’t do – with respect to customers were identified as contributing to the problem.
- Compounding the problem is the realization that we are dealing with a large country with diverse demographics and multiple languages.

Partnership/collaborative approaches to remedy above?

- So how do we remedy the obstacles noted? Once again, we first need to change attitudes about risk, and hand in hand with this, make safety and all that comprises the practice of boating safety sexy and positive.
- Nonetheless, to substantiate the safety messages, more data and suitably packaged data is required. In this regard, mention was made that data collection should be mandated.
- Any educational initiatives should, to the extent possible, be inclusive of all stakeholders whose mandate includes preaching safe boating. Many examples were given, including manufacturers, retailers, non-profits and more. And of course, these stakeholders need to collaborate more and design and implement joint campaigns. With regard to communications and education, messaging needs to coordinated (“centralized” was also mentioned but without specifics) and consistent.
- Within the context of the above, numerous outliers were noted, including:
    - Explore the concept of insurance companies providing boaters with a discount on their policy premium based on proof of operator education and training. Again, given the brevity of this C&C exercise and the notes provided, the nature of this “proof” was not elaborated upon. However, it was noted that there would be need for a governing body to oversee and identify what constitutes appropriate proof of training.
    - Use boat shows and other such venues to display but more importantly, demonstrate marine safety gear, in particular lifejackets. In the same vein, major retailers should include classes in their stores.
    - While fatality data shows that the sector at risk is not children it was suggested that early messaging targeting kids would be beneficial and that incorporation of appropriate content in school programs should be explored.
    - Revise the CSBC’s Safety First Marine (SFM) on-line program.
    - In keeping with the evolving social media culture, use signage that includes QR codes.
- Better enforcement received only an isolated mention, perhaps a function of an ingrained acceptance of constraints and resource limitations?

Obstacles to making these partnership approaches a reality and how to overcome them?

- This 3rd question was perhaps superfluous inasmuch as it elicited yet again some of the challenges and solutions already noted above.
- First is the need for a strategy to overcome boaters' mindsets. Yes, this would require commitment, effort, and resources, not least of which is money. Also required is an organization to step up and assume a leadership role. But who?
- Realistically, it was noted that any one organization can't do everything (the CSBC was mentioned in this regard). Collaboration is required, and again, there needs to be "unified" messaging, i.e. everyone singing from the same songsheet. An interesting comment made was that messages should ideally be delivered by those "with no skin in the game" (not benefit the bottom line) in order to further enhance the message's credibility. As an aside and when identifying collaborators, it was suggested that we cast the net wide and reach out to other groups such as hunters, sport fishers, Indigenous organizations (incl. APTN TV) and more. And as for manufacturers and retailers, they should be encouraged (another group said "challenged") to use ads with more lifejacket wear and other examples of appropriate safe boating behaviour.
- Further echoing the need for resources and backing, it was suggested that government decision-makers be shown the economic impact and the cost of doing nothing. Speaking of government, mandating the provision of more boat operator education was suggested.

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