

BUI: Nobody Wins

Story and photos by PA2 Bobby Nash, PADET Jacksonville, Fla.

PORT CANAVERAL, Fla. – The wind was high, the sun hidden behind thick, grey clouds and the air was heavy that Saturday afternoon, as Coast Guard and Brevard County Sheriff’s deputies were making their way towards the boat ramp to keep families safe on the water that less-than-perfect spring day.

The boat ramp was not as busy as usual for a Saturday afternoon.



PORT CANAVERAL, Fla. -- Petty Officer 2nd Class Chris Kelly, from Coast Guard Station Port Canaveral, completes paper work on a boater that was just arrested for boating under the influence. A boater arrested the first time for BUI can expect jail time and a fine up to \$5,000. Coast Guard photograph by PA2 Bobby Nash.

“There aren’t that many folks on the water today; it must be because of the weather,” said Petty Officer Geoff Parkinson, a boarding officer from Coast Guard Station Port Canaveral. “

The two boarding officers from Station Canaveral backed their truck and trailered small boat to the water’s edge and launched their small boat while a group of boys played in the water nearby, trying to escape the muggy thick air.

Shortly afterwards, two deputies from BCSO’s special operations DUI unit arrived at the boat ramp and boarded the small boat for the day’s work ahead of them. The four law-enforcement officers were then off scouring the waters for boaters operating under the influence.

The day was perfect for wind surfers, and they were everywhere.

“These aren’t exactly the type of boaters we’re looking for today,” said Petty Officer Chris Kelly. “I’m sure there are boaters in the canal or Sykes Creek, we should start there where the water isn’t as choppy.”

It didn’t take long to find a group of boaters in the industrial canal enjoying the smoother ride on the sheltered waters.

The first boat boarded was a father and son on their 16-foot boat spending some time together on the water. The second boat boarded was exactly what the Coast Guard and BCSO was looking for today, a boater operating under the influence.

The man was arrested for suspicion of BUI and placed in handcuffs on the Coast Guard's small boat after a field sobriety test was administered. Petty Officer Parkinson then searched the boat as a matter of procedure.

"We've got something here," said Parkinson to the other officers. He then removed a black film canister with marijuana inside complete with paraphernalia from the dash console of the boater's vessel.

The boat was towed back to dock by the Coast Guard's small boat because the woman aboard was also too intoxicated to safely and legally operate the vessel on her own. Back at the dock, the man was led by the two deputies and two boarding officers to a squad car to be taken to the county jail for BUI and simple possession. Two hours into the day's work and the team had made their first arrest.

A boater arrested for BUI the first time can expect a night in jail and up to \$5,000 in fines.

The team found even more success back at the boat ramp. Boaters were returning from an afternoon of fun on the water -- some of them were having too much fun.

Kelly spots a jet ski and a 12-foot boat speeding through a manatee zone on their way back to the dock. He approaches the two vessels and notices several empty beer cans in the small boat. He immediately begins asking the four people how much they have had to drink today. The two men who were operating the vessels might be intoxicated so Kelly begins his field sobriety test. The two females who were out having a good time with their two male friends are visibly not happy.

The first man who was driving the 12-foot boat with two women aboard doesn't appear to be intoxicated, although he has admitted to "having a few." Kelly simply cites him for speeding in a manatee zone, a \$125 fine for a first time offense.

The second man, the operator of the jet ski, isn't so lucky. He is arrested for BUI, cited for speeding in a manatee zone and taken into custody. The man is visibly very upset.

Kelly does his best to try and comfort the man, but reminds him of the severity of what could have happened if the drunk boater had hit someone.

"I hope you've learned an important lesson today. We could have saved your life or someone else's, said Parkinson. "We're out here to help keep the water safe for families just trying to have a good time on the water."



PORT CANAVERAL, Fla. -- A boater under arrest for boating under the influence submits to a breath test on a Coast Guard boat near Sykes Creek, Fla. A boater arrested the first time for BUI can expect jail time and a fine up to \$5,000. Coast Guard photograph by PA2 Bobby Nash.

The four-person team sets out again with the light now completely gone for one last patrol. It doesn't take long for them to find a 26-foot boat packed full of adults laughing and having a good time in Sykes Creek. The team pulls up to the boat and does a vessel safety inspection to ensure they have enough life jackets for everyone on the boat. The stale perfume of alcohol oozes from the crowded boat.



PORT CANAVERAL, Fla. -- A boater is stopped for a vessel safety inspection and given a field sobriety test for suspicion of boating under the influence in Sykes Creek, Fla. A boater arrested the first time for BUI can expect jail time and a fine up to \$5,000. Coast Guard photograph by PA2 Bobby Nash.

“Have you been drinking tonight?” asks one of the deputies to the operator. The man operating the boat begins to explain that “he’s had a few” and is admittedly impaired, but his wife is doing most of the driving.

The deputy explains that it doesn't matter if you operate your vessel for 10 miles or 10 minutes illegally, because it's still illegal and a lot can go wrong in a very short period of time.

The man is arrested for BUI and brought back to the nearest boat ramp for pick up to the county jail. After the paperwork is done and a search of vessel is complete the rest of the party is allowed to leave, although spirits are now considerably less high.

The final arrest of the night is made and the crew heads back to trailer their boat and head home. It's early morning now and the four person crew feels good about what they accomplished in an afternoon, especially with the poor weather. A total of four arrests for BUI were made and two citations for speeding in a manatee zone were issued.

“Anytime we can get boaters off the water for BUI it's great; however, we would prefer that we just didn't need to be out here for this at all, said Parkinson.

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