



# **LIFE SAVING VICTORIA BOATING SAFETY FOR KIDS EVALUATION REPORT**



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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## ***Background and Objectives***

This report presents the findings for the Life Saving Victoria evaluation of the Boating Safety for Kids Program. Designed to educate the community on changes in boating regulations and general boating safety, the objective of the program was to deliver high quality boating safety education to middle and senior Victorian primary school children (Grades 4-6). The specific aims of the program were to:

- develop knowledge of personal safety while boating;
- encourage participants to reinforce safety messages back to parents, grandparents and other family members.

## ***Methods***

A Boating Safety for Kids Quiz was developed to assess student knowledge of boating and water safety following the program. The quiz was then sent to a random selection of 20 schools in metropolitan and regional Victoria who had completed the program (intervention group) along with 20 geographically matched control schools who had not completed the program previously (control group). A follow-up quiz was sent to the same schools 3 months later to determine longer term retention of information.

## ***Findings***

Nine schools responded to the initial Boating Safety for Kids Quiz and four of those completed the follow-up quiz. Similarly 8 of the 20 control schools contacted participated in the initial quiz and 4 completed the follow-up quiz. Thus the study sample consisted of 856 students at Time 1 and 264 students at Time 2.

Knowledge levels about boating safety were compared between intervention and control groups at Time 1 and Time 2. Children in the intervention group had significantly greater levels of knowledge about trip preparation, safety equipment; checking the weather, and most aspects of emergency responses compared with controls at both Time 1 and 2.

The results demonstrate that in the two to three weeks following the Boating Safety for Kids theory session the majority of participants remembered many of the important aspects of boating safety taught in the sessions. Comparing these results to the control group this level of knowledge about boating safety was significantly greater than for children not participating in the program.

Assessment of knowledge after a further 3 months demonstrated that except for one variable the intervention group retained their boating safety knowledge over the longer term. In addition, approximately half of the intervention group said that they told their parents about what they had learnt in the program. This demonstrates the transference of key boating safety messages via the program.

## ***Conclusions and Recommendations***

This study has demonstrated that students are learning important boating safety messages from the Boating Safety for Kids Program and are passing on some of this information to their parents. The study further demonstrates that this knowledge can be retained over a period of 3 months.

In order to improve the reliability of the results and subsequently use the results to further promote the course it is recommended that:

1. The quiz be administered to intervention schools prior to participation in the Boating Safety for Kids program (to ensure a baseline level of knowledge is obtained prior to intervention).

2. The sample size of intervention schools is increased to achieve at least 600 students in the intervention group.
  - a. Improve data collection methods and follow-up to improve retention rates
3. The questionnaire be revised to ensure all questions are clear and are the most appropriate to establish the key boating safety messages retained.
  - a. More questions regarding different emergency scenarios may be appropriate, particularly if the groups sampled include a number of schools that have undertaken both the theory and practical sessions as this may distinguish greater levels of knowledge in a practical setting.

## BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

From 1999 to 2002 there were 40 fatalities from recreational boating incidents in Victoria. A study of these incidents by the Victorian Coroner's Office identified a combination of three factors that contributed to these fatalities: hazardous environmental conditions; vessel occupants suddenly and unexpectedly entering the water; and absence of personal flotation device (PFD) use. The study also found that 50% of fatalities involved vessels capsizing and 14% person overboard. Many of the capsize incidents were caused by prevailing environmental conditions and operator error, that is, either inexperience or poor judgement. In response to these and other findings a number of initiatives were undertaken by Marine Safety Victoria, including: education programs and public awareness campaigns, the introduction of boat operator licensing, and new legislation on PFDs and other safety equipment.

In addition Life Saving Victoria in conjunction with Yachting Victoria developed the Boating Safety for Kids program. In 2004 an interactive theory component of the program, tailored for the classroom, was developed by Life Saving Victoria. These sessions aimed to educate children on trip preparation, safety equipment, PFD use, dangers in both inland and open waterways, emergency response and licensing.

Designed to educate the community on changes in boating regulations and general boating safety the objective of the project was to deliver a high quality boating safety education program (Boating Safety for Kids) to middle and senior Victorian primary school children (Grades 4-6). The specific aims of the program were to:

- Develop knowledge of personal safety while boating;
- Encourage participants to reinforce safety messages back to parents, grandparents and family members.

The emphasis of the program was on the key boating safety rules outlined in the Victorian Recreational Boating Safety Handbook.

Following funding from Marine Safety Victoria the program was rolled out across metropolitan and regional Victoria. The program reached an average of 10,660 school children per year across Victoria since its inception in 2003/2004. This report presents findings from the evaluation of the program.

## METHODS

A Boating Safety for Kids Quiz was developed to assess student knowledge of boating and water safety following the program. The quiz was based on key boating safety messages in the Boating Safety for Kids interactive workbook and teachers guide, and in accordance with the Victorian Recreational Boating Safety Handbook. The original version of the quiz was reviewed by Life Saving Victoria staff that had assisted with design and/or delivery of the theory component of Boating Safety for Kids. Revised versions of the quiz were also reviewed by staff from Marine Safety Victoria and Yachting Victoria for content accuracy and readability. A pilot version of the quiz was then trialled on a school group who had recently participated in the program to ensure comprehension and readability. Minor changes were made following each of these stages.

The final version of the quiz was then sent to a random selection of 20 schools in metropolitan and regional Victoria who had completed the program (intervention group) along with 20 geographically matched control schools who had not completed the program (control group). A follow-up quiz was sent to the same schools 3-months later to determine longer term retention of information.

All data were stored in a password protected Microsoft Excel database. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS Version 14 for Windows. Tests included Mann-Whitney U, Pearson's Chi-Squared and Z-tests as appropriate for the distribution and nature of data. The level of significance was taken as P-value <0.05.

# FINDINGS

## Participants

Of the 20 intervention schools contacted 9 schools responded to the initial Boating Safety for Kids Quiz. Only 4 of the original 9 schools completed the follow-up quiz. Similarly 8 of the 20 control schools contacted participated in the initial quiz and 4 completed the follow-up quiz. Thus the study sample consisted of 856 students at Time 1 (289 in the intervention group and 567 in the control group), and 264 students at Time 2 (43 intervention and 221 controls). The resultant response rate at Time 2 was 15% for the intervention group and 39% for the control group.

The demographic data of the participating children are provided in Table 1. There was no significant difference in gender of the children completing the quiz at either Time 1 or Time 2. However, there was a statistically significant difference in the proportion of children in each age group at both Time 1 and Time 2. Children in the intervention group were slightly older on average than the control group at both Time 1 (mean age 11.10 vs 10.50 respectively) and Time 2 (mean age 11.28 vs 10.75 respectively). While being statistically significant, this 6 month difference in age between the groups is not considered clinically significant.

Due to the small sample size of intervention group at Time 2 (n=43) these results should be interpreted with caution.

**Table 1.** Demographic Data

	Time 1				Time 2			
	Intervention (n= 289)		Control (n= 567)		Intervention ( n= 43)		Control (n= 221)	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<b>Age***</b>								
9 years	7	2%	67	12%	0	0%	9	4%
10 years	47	16%	205	36%	5	12%	71	32%
11 years	122	42%	237	42%	21	49%	107	48%
12 years	88	30%	58	10%	17	40%	33	15%
<b>Gender</b>								
Male	160	55%	298	53%	22	51%	100	45%
Female	129	45%	269	47%	21	49%	121	55%

\*\*\* Significance level  $P < 0.001$  in Chi-Squared comparison between intervention and control groups

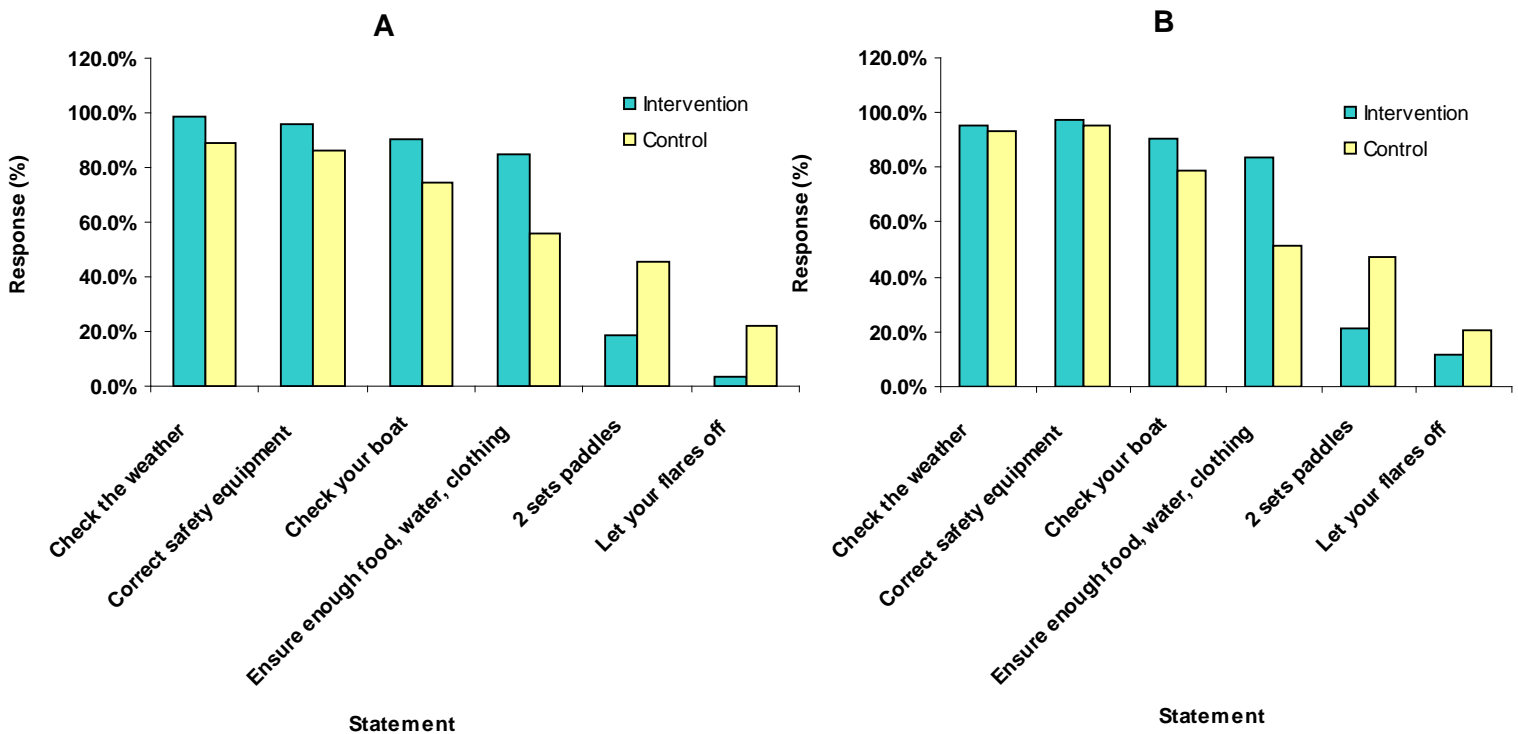
In the follow-up questionnaire at Time 2, 53% of the intervention group said that they told their parents about what they had learnt in the Boating Safety program.

# Knowledge

## Trip Preparation

Knowledge levels about preparing for a boating trip were compared between intervention and control groups at Time 1 and Time 2 (Table 2). Children in the intervention group had significantly greater levels of knowledge about trip preparation compared with controls at both Time 1 and 2. At Time 1 the majority of children in the intervention group selected all 4 statements correctly, 74%, compared to only 27% of the control group. Similarly at Time 2 the majority of children in the intervention group selected all statements correctly, 70%, compared to only 29% of the control group.

When looking at the specific statements that the children answered correctly, over 80% of the intervention group answered correctly that you should *check the weather, make sure you have the correct safety equipment, including a PFD for everybody on board, check your boat, and make sure you have enough food, water and clothing before you go out boating*, at both Time 1 and 2. A slightly smaller proportion of the control group selected the correct statements that you should *check the weather, make sure you have the correct safety equipment, and check your boat*, and approximately half of the control group knew that you should *make sure you have enough food, water and clothing before you go out boating* (Figure 1). In addition, a greater number of the control group selected the incorrect responses, *make sure you have two sets of paddles and let your flares off to check they work*, at Time 1 and 2.



**Figure 1.** The percentage of children selecting each of the responses to the question: *From the following statements tick the 4 things you should do before you go boating at* A) Time 1 and B) Time 2.

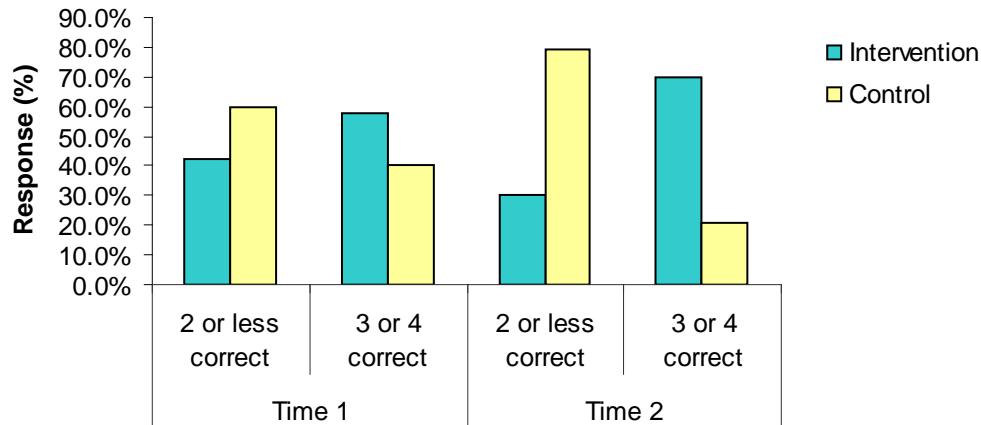
**Table 2.** Differences in level of knowledge about boating safety between intervention and control groups at Time 1 and Time 2.

	Time 1				Time 2			
	Intervention (n= 289)		Control (n= 567)		Intervention ( n= 43)		Control (n= 221)	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<b><u>Trip Preparation</u></b>								
<b><i>Tick the 4 things you should do before you go boating (number correct)***</i></b>								
0	1	0.3%	8	1.4%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
1	0	0.0%	22	3.9%	0	0.0%	3	1.4%
2	7	2.4%	61	10.8%	1	2.3%	18	8.1%
3	66	22.8%	325	57.3%	12	27.9%	135	61.1%
4	215	74.4%	151	26.6%	30	69.8%	65	29.4%
<b><u>Weather</u></b>								
<b><i>Write down 4 ways you can find out about the weather (number correct)***</i></b>								
0	57	19.7%	106	18.7%	3	7.0%	41	18.6%
1	19	6.6%	89	15.7%	0	0.0%	57	25.8%
2	46	15.9%	143	25.2%	10	23.3%	77	34.8%
3	101	34.9%	168	29.6%	13	30.2%	41	18.6%
4	66	22.8%	61	10.8%	17	39.5%	5	2.3%
<b><u>Safety Equipment</u></b>								
<b><i>What does PFD stand for?*</i></b>								
Correct	204	70.6%	280	49.4%	36	83.7%	145	65.6%
Incorrect / Don't know	85	29.4%	287	50.6%	7	16.3%	76	34.4%
<b><i>Which is the best type of PFD to keep you afloat in the water?***</i></b>								
Type 1	185	64.0%	95	16.8%	21	48.8%	40	18.1%
Type 2	37	12.8%	197	34.7%	8	18.6%	117	52.9%
Type 3	35	12.1%	101	17.8%	10	23.3%	50	22.6%
Don't know	32	11.1%	174	30.7%	4	9.3%	14	6.3%
<b><i>When should you wear a PFD?(Time 1***, Time 2 Non-significant)</i></b>								
Correct	204	70.6%	266	46.9%	32	74.4%	136	61.5%
Incorrect / Don't know	85	29.4%	301	53.1%	11	25.6%	85	38.5%
<b><i>What colour flares should you use in an emergency at night?*</i></b>								
Correct	214	74.0%	272	48.0%	29	67.4%	103	46.6%
Incorrect / Don't know	75	26.0%	295	52.0%	14	32.6%	118	53.4%
<b><i>Where would you put the fire extinguisher on boat?(Time 1**, Time 2 Non-significant)</i></b>								
Correct	160	55.4%	248	43.7%	27	64.3%	107	48.4%
Incorrect / Don't know	129	44.6%	319	56.3%	15	35.7%	114	51.6%
<b><u>Emergency Responses</u></b>								
<b><i>If you are waterskiing and fall off your skis into the water what should you do?</i></b>								
Correct	178	73.3%	380	67.0%	35	81.4%	149	67.4%
Incorrect / Don't know	65	26.7%	187	33.0%	8	18.6%	72	32.6%
<b><i>What does H.E.L.P stand for?***</i></b>								
Correct	82	28.4%	0	0.0%	9	20.9%	0	0.0%
Incorrect / Don't know	207	71.6%	567	100.0%	34	79.1%	221	100.0%
<b><i>If you are in the huddle position and someone is really cold where would you put them?*</i></b>								
Correct	150	51.9%	124	21.9%	23	53.5%	74	33.5%
Incorrect / Don't know	139	48.1%	443	78.1%	20	46.5%	147	66.5%

Significance level in Chi-Squared comparison between control and intervention groups: \*P<0.05; \*\*P<0.01; \*\*\* P<0.001

## Weather

At least 80% of children in both intervention and control groups knew at least one way that they could find out about the weather before going boating at Time 1 and 2 (Table 2). This is not surprising given this would be something that many children would know through general knowledge. However, significantly more children in the intervention group could list 3 or 4 ways to find out about the weather compared to the control group at Time 1 and 2 (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** The percentage of responses by intervention and control groups at Time 1 and Time 2 in response to the question: *Write down 4 ways you can find out about the weather.*

## Safety Equipment

Knowledge levels about safety equipment usage when boating were compared between intervention and control groups at Time 1 and 2 (Table 2). Children in the intervention group had significantly greater levels of knowledge about safety equipment compared with controls at Time 1. A greater proportion of the intervention group also had greater levels of safety equipment knowledge compared with controls at Time 2 however these differences were not statistically significant for all questions.

Significantly more children in the intervention group knew that PFD stands for Personal Flotation Device compared to the control group at Time 1 and 2. In addition, significantly more children in the intervention group knew that the best type of PFD to keep you afloat in the water is a PFD Type 1. The majority of children in the intervention group (64%) correctly answered PFD Type 1 compared to only 17% of the control group at Time 1. A lower proportion (49%) of the intervention group correctly responded Type 1 to this question at Time 2, however, this was still greater than controls (18%).

When asked *'when should you wear a PFD'* the majority of children in the intervention group knew that they should wear a PFD any time they are on a boat (71% at Time 1 and 74% at Time 2) compared to controls (47% at Time 1 and 62% at Time 2).

The majority of children in the intervention group also knew that you should use a red coloured flare in an emergency at night (74% at Time 1 and 67% at Time 2) compared to controls (48% at Time 1 and 47% at Time 2).

Only just over half of the intervention group (55% at Time 1 and 64% at Time 2) knew where to put the fire extinguisher on a boat. This was still significantly greater than the

control group at Time 1 (44%) but not at Time 2 (48%). The specific or ideal placement of a fire extinguisher on a boat may be an area that is not covered in detail in the theory sessions or may be one area that is missed if there are time limitations on a session.



### ***Emergency Responses***

The majority of both intervention and controls knew that in a situation where they fell off their water skis into the water they should get into the H.E.L.P position and raise one arm into the air. While the proportion of the intervention group answering this correctly was greater than the controls, there was no significant difference between the groups. The lack of difference in this question may have been due to the response being the most obvious rather than actual knowledge of what the H.E.L.P position actually is.

While only 28% and 21% of the intervention students knew what the H.E.L.P position stood for at Time 1 and 2 respectively, none of the controls answered this question correctly. This provides an indication that the students have learnt and retained knowledge from the program. The small proportion of intervention students getting this question correct may indicate the difficulty of this question. It may also be the case that this area of the theory component is either not as strongly focussed on during the sessions or may be more difficult for children to remember.

While not many students knew exactly what H.E.L.P stood for, a greater number knew to get into the H.E.L.P position in the scenario provided. These results may indicate that the key practical messages are being learnt and retained. As many of the control group also answered the scenario question correctly the results may further indicate that the correct response to the question was the most obvious of the choices provided. Therefore both of these questions may need to be revised to be clearer and to more adequately determine the key water safety information that the sessions aim to provide in this area.

When asked about the Huddle position more intervention students knew that to keep someone warm in the Huddle position they should be in the middle. Around half of the intervention group answered this question correctly at Time 1 and 2 (Table 2). This was significantly greater than the control group with the majority answering this question incorrectly.

The larger number of correct responses to the Huddle question may be due to the wording of the question. In regards to the H.E.L.P position it may be more relevant to

determine whether students understand what this position is rather than exactly what the letters stand for.



## Change in knowledge over time

In order to assess the retention of information about boating safety from the program, comparisons were made between Time 1 and Time 2 in both the intervention and control groups. When the differences within each group were compared between Time 1 and Time 2 it was anticipated that the control group would not vary in knowledge scores obtained. It was also hypothesised that there would be no difference in the knowledge scores obtained by the intervention group at Time 1 and Time 2. This would indicate that they retained their level of boating safety knowledge over time.

There was no change in scores obtained by the intervention group between Time 1 and Time 2 in all questions except one. The one question in which the intervention group showed a decrease in knowledge was in response to the question '*which is the best type of PFD to keep you afloat in the water*'. While the greatest proportion of students in the intervention group still correctly responded PFD Type 1 there was a 15% decrease observed from Time 1 to Time 2.

While there may have been some decrease in the retention of knowledge about the best type of PFD to keep you afloat in the water the majority of children knew what a PFD was and that it should be worn all the times when boating. Therefore the results indicate that the key boating safety messages are being retained. If the type of PFD to be worn is considered to be a key element of the program to be remembered by children the focus given to this in the theory session may need to be revised.

There was no change in scores obtained by the control group between Time 1 and Time 2 for all except two questions. The control group showed a 20% decrease from Time 1 to Time 2 in the number of ways they knew that they could find out about the weather. This variation is not surprising given the general nature of this question. The controls also showed a 12% increase in the number of correct responses to the question about the huddle position. However, while the number of correct responses increased the majority of the control group still answered this question incorrectly at both Time 1 (78%) and Time 2 (67%).

## **Summary**

Overall, the results demonstrate that in the two to three weeks following the Boating Safety for Kids theory session the majority of participants remembered many of the important aspects of boating safety taught in the sessions. Comparing these results to the control group this level of knowledge about boating safety was significantly greater than for children not participating in the program.

Assessment of knowledge after a further 3-months demonstrated that except for one variable (the best type of PFD to keep you afloat) the intervention group retained their boating safety knowledge over the longer term.

In addition, approximately half of the intervention group said that they told their parents about what they had learnt in the program. This demonstrates the transference of key boating safety messages via the program.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has demonstrated that students are learning important boating safety messages from the Boating Safety for Kids Program and are passing on some of this information to their parents. The study further demonstrates that this knowledge can be retained over a period of 3-months. Further research is necessary to fully determine the retention of knowledge over an even longer period of time.

### **Recommendations**

In order to improve the reliability of the results and subsequently use the results to further promote the course it is recommended that:

1. The quiz be administered to intervention schools prior to participation in the Boating Safety for Kids program (to ensure a baseline level of knowledge is obtained prior to intervention).
2. The sample size of intervention schools is increased to achieve at least 600 students in the intervention group.
  - a. Improve data collection methods and follow-up to improve retention rates
3. The questionnaire be revised to ensure all questions are clear and are the most appropriate to establish the key boating safety messages retained.
  - a. More questions regarding different emergency scenarios may be appropriate, particularly if the groups sampled include a number of schools that have undertaken both the theory and practical sessions as this may distinguish greater levels of knowledge in a practical setting.



## REFERENCES

Recreational Vessel Fatalities in Victoria: 1999-2002, State Coroner's Office, Dept of Human Services & Marine Safety Victoria  
Victorian Recreational Boating Safety Handbook, Marine Safety Victoria, July 2002

## APPENDIX: Boating Safety for Kids Quiz



### Boating Safety for Kids Quiz

Your School's Name	.....
Your Teacher's Name	.....
Your Name (optional)	.....
Your Age (years)	.....
Please tick	<input type="checkbox"/> Girl <input type="checkbox"/> Boy

#### Trip Preparation

From the following statements tick the 4 things you should do before you go boating?

(Only 4 of these statements are correct, tick only the 4 you think you should do)

Check the weather	<input type="checkbox"/>
Let your flares off to check they work	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make sure you have the correct safety equipment (including a PFD for everybody on board)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make sure you have enough food, water and clothing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Check your boat	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make sure you have 2 sets of paddles	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Safety Equipment

What does PFD stand for?

P

F

D

---

Which is the best type of PFD to keep you afloat in the water?

Type 1

Type 2

Type 3

When should you wear a PFD?

---

What colour flares should you use in an emergency at night?

---

What 4 items could you use to throw to someone in trouble so that they can swim back to safety?

1)

---

2)

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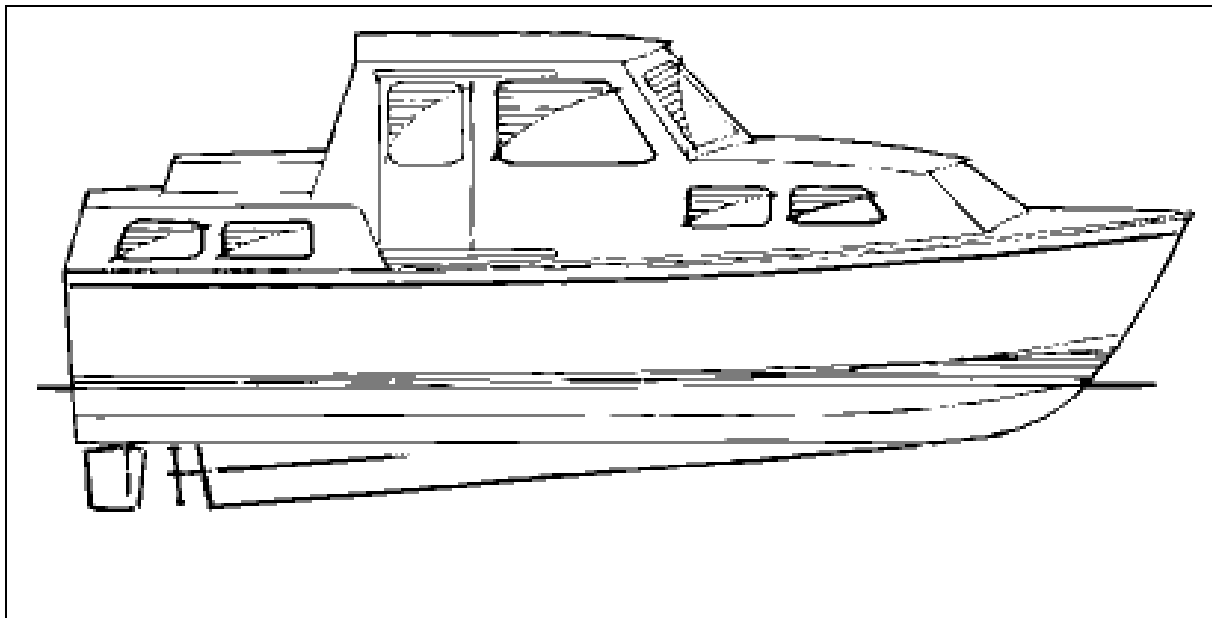
3)

---

4)

---

The picture below shows a boat. Please place an X on the area where you would put the fire extinguisher?



## Weather

Write down 4 ways you can find out about the weather:

1)

---

2)

---

3)

---

4)

---

## Dangers and Risks on the Water

Write down 3 things on a boat that can be dangerous:

1)

---

2)

---

3)

---

Tick which of the waterways listed below are inland waterways:

Rivers    Oceans    Lakes    Dams    Beaches

What are 2 dangers that you might find in these inland waterways?

1)

---

2)

---

Tick which of the waterways listed below are open waterways:

Rivers    Oceans    Lakes    Dams    Beaches

What are 2 dangers that you might find in these open waterways?

1)

---

2)

---

## Emergency Responses

If you are out waterskiing and you fall off your skis into the water what should you do?

(Only 1 of these statements is correct, tick only the 1 you think you should do)

	Tick 1 only
Float on your back	<input type="checkbox"/>
Swim back to the boat	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get into the H.E.L.P position and raise one arm into the air	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Staying warm - H.E.L.P or Huddle positions

What does H.E.L.P stand for?

H                      E                      L                      P

---

If you are in the huddle position and someone is really cold where would you put them?

---

Have you done this quiz before?       Yes       No

**Thank you for completing this quiz**

# Boating Safety for Kids Quiz

Your School's Name .....

Your Teacher's Name .....

Your Name (optional) .....

Your Age (years) .....

Please tick

Girl

Boy

Did you tell your parents about some of the things you learnt about boating safety?

Yes

No

If yes, what were some of the boating safety things you talked to them about?

---

---

---

## Trip Preparation

From the following statements tick the 4 things you should do before you go boating?

(Only 4 of these statements are correct, tick only the 4 you think you should do)

Check the weather	<input type="checkbox"/>
Let your flares off to check they work	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make sure you have the correct safety equipment (including a PFD for everybody on board)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make sure you have enough food, water and clothing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Check your boat	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make sure you have 2 sets of paddles	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Safety Equipment

What does PFD stand for?

P

F

D

---

Which is the best type of PFD to keep you afloat in the water?

Type 1

Type 2

Type 3

When should you wear a PFD?

---

What colour flares should you use in an emergency at night?

---

What 4 items could you use to throw to someone in trouble so that they can swim back to safety?

1)

---

2)

---

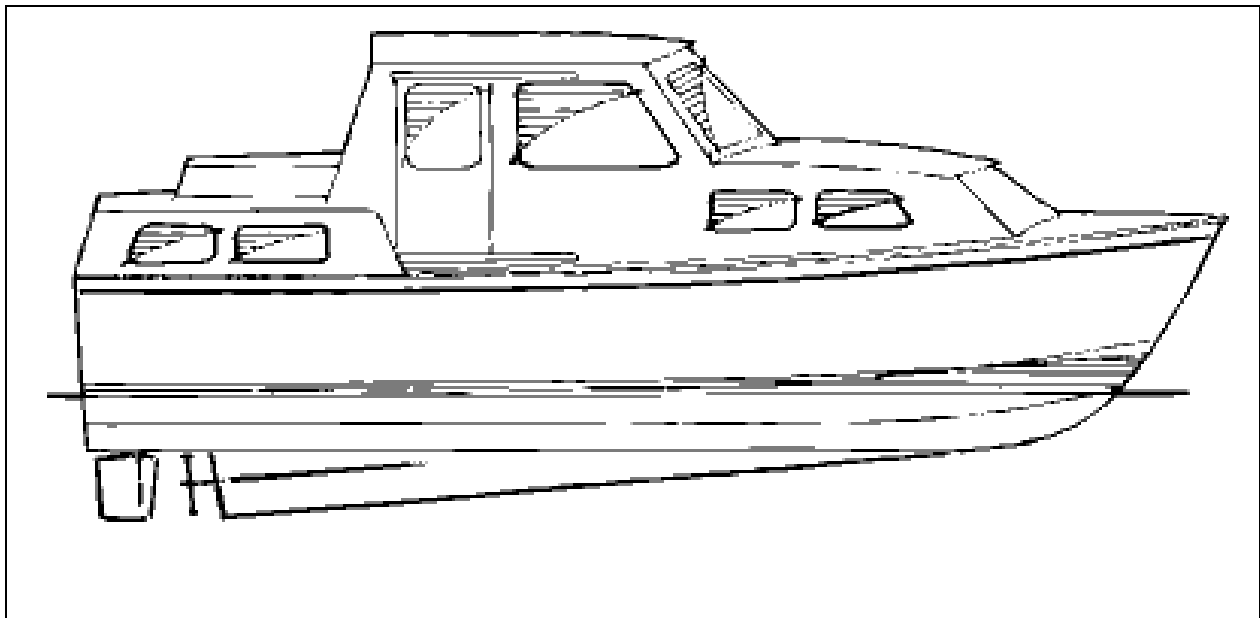
3)

---

4)

---

The picture below shows a boat. Please place an X on the area where you would put the fire extinguisher?



## Weather

Write down 4 ways you can find out about the weather:

1)

---

2)

---

3)

---

4)

---

## Dangers and Risks on the Water

Write down 3 things on a boat that can be dangerous:

1)

---

2)

---

3)

---

Tick which of the waterways listed below are inland waterways:

Rivers     Oceans     Lakes     Dams     Beaches

What are 2 dangers that you might find in these inland waterways?

1)

---

2)

---

Tick which of the waterways listed below are open waterways:

Rivers     Oceans     Lakes     Dams     Beaches

What are 2 dangers that you might find in these open waterways?

1)

---

2)

---

## Emergency Responses

If you are out waterskiing and you fall off your skis into the water what should you do?

(Only 1 of these statements is correct, tick only the 1 you think you should do)

	Tick 1 only
Float on your back	<input type="checkbox"/>
Swim back to the boat	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get into the H.E.L.P position and raise one arm into the air	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Staying warm - H.E.L.P or Huddle positions

What does H.E.L.P stand for?

H                      E                      L                      P

---

If you are in the huddle position and someone is really cold where would you put them?

---

Have you done this quiz before?       Yes       No

**Thank you for completing this quiz**