

# OPINION

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THE REGISTER'S EDITORIAL

## Take action to prevent drunken boating

### House leadership should bring bill to vote.

Last year the Iowa Senate unanimously passed legislation to lower the legal blood-alcohol limit for boat operators from 0.10 to 0.08. It was the right move, matching the legal limit to operate a motor vehicle on Iowa roads.

Legally drunk is legally drunk, whether one is driving a truck, sedan or motorboat.

Senators knew Iowa has one of the lowest blood-alcohol limits in the nation. And of the nearly 200 boating accidents in Iowa from 2004 to 2006, about 20 percent involved alcohol. They knew it was past time for the state to take seriously the issue of drinking and boating.

So what is the problem in the

Iowa House?

Last session, the House passed a version of the legislation that applied only to certain boats. The legislation died when the Senate and House failed to reach a consensus on amendments to the bill.

Summer is approaching, and Iowans will take to the water. Now is the time for the House to pass Senate File 49 to lower the limit to 0.08. But first it has to get to the floor for a debate and vote — which will require support from House leadership.

It's hard to imagine the legislation would meet opposition. In

2005, Iowa was reminded that boating and drinking can be a lethal combination when a drunken boater struck Perry dentist Michael Brosnahan and four other people. Brosnahan died.

Passing this legislation would send a message that drunken boating will not be tolerated on Iowa waterways.

According to Phil Petersen of the Iowa Great Lakes Water Safety Council, 40 states have adopted the 0.08 limit for impaired boaters. He said his organization has been trying for more than a year to get Iowa lawmakers to lower the legal blood-alcohol limit for boat

operators.

"This legislation is about making Iowans safe on the water from those that have had too much to drink," he wrote in an e-mail to the Register.

Exactly.

It makes no sense that it is illegal for an Iowan with a blood-alcohol level of 0.09 to get in a car and drive to the lake. But that Iowan can step out of the car, get in a boat and speed off across the water — and not be breaking the law.

Being drunk and operating a boat puts lives at risk. It's up to lawmakers to make summer fun safer for all Iowans.

#### Contact lawmakers

Senate File 49 lowers the current 0.10 blood-alcohol limit for motorboat or sailboat operating-while-intoxicated offenses to 0.08. Contact House Speaker Pat Murphy and Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy to urge them to move this legislation to the floor for a vote.

E-mail Murphy at [Pat.Murphy@legis.state.ia.us](mailto:Pat.Murphy@legis.state.ia.us) and McCarthy at [Kevin.McCarthy@legis.state.ia.us](mailto:Kevin.McCarthy@legis.state.ia.us). Both can be reached through the House switchboard at (515) 281-3221.