7 boating safety tips for smooth sailing this summer.

Warm weather is finally on its way and everyone's eager to be on the water. But don't let your crew be in such a rush that they forget these important safety precautions.

Before you go

A safe day of boating begins before you ever get near the water.

- **Know what you're doing.** Take an online or local community course in boating safety. Some states require this, but even if yours doesn't, it's a great idea. Patriot's boat insurance includes discounts for boating safety courses. Involve the whole family and set a good example for your future skippers.
- **Get a free safety check of your boat.** The U.S. Coast Guard will perform a free Vessel Safety Check. All you have to do is make a request online. The safety check is for your education and peace of mind – there are no penalties if your boat doesn't pass.
- **Follow a pre-departure checklist.** This includes making sure you have all the necessary safety equipment, and that you thoroughly inspect your boat. This printable checklist from DiscoverBoating.com will help you make sure everything is shipshape before you ship out.
- **Let someone know your float plan.** Tell a family member, friend and/or someone at the marina your float plan: where you're going, how long you plan to be gone, your itinerary, and how you can be contacted.

On the water

- **Wear your life jacket.** It's not enough to just have the jacket on board. Coast Guard statistics

indicate that in more than 80% of boating deaths due to drowning, the victims were not wearing a life jacket. Inspect life jackets at the beginning of boating season and replace if defective.

- **Avoid alcohol.** Almost half of all boating accidents involve alcohol. Alcohol impairs your balance, judgment and reaction time. Boating while intoxicated is also a federal offense subject to a $1,000 fine and possibly even more in criminal penalties.
- **Use good judgment.** Stay alert and steer clear of large vessels that can't maneuver quickly. Operate at a safe speed, and if the weather takes an unexpected turn for the worse, get off the water. In other words, use your common sense to stay safe.

There's nothing quite like a carefree summer day on the water. Get everybody on board with these safety precautions, make sure you have adequate insurance coverage for your boat, and then get out and make some memories.