

Sea Tow Foundation™ Announces Winners of the 2026 National Boating Safety Awards

*Recognizing Outstanding Efforts Within the Marine Industry
Helping Create More Confident Boaters*

Southold, NY (October 6, 2026) – The [Sea Tow Foundation™](#), a national non-profit dedicated to reducing boating-related accidents and fatalities, in partnership with its Boating Safety Advisory Council, is proud to announce the winners of the [2026 National Boating Safety Awards](#). Now in its eighth year, the awards recognize outstanding efforts within the recreational boating industry that promote safe and responsible boating to help build more confident boaters.

The 2026 National Boating Safety Awards were presented at [IBEX](#) (International BoatBuilders' Exhibition & Conference) in Tampa, FL, on Tuesday, October 6.

New this year, the awards feature nine categories focused on how boating safety is being promoted across the industry by recognizing outstanding education, community engagement, digital initiatives, technology, partnerships, campaigns, and advocacy.

"The 2026 winners demonstrate just how many different ways our industry focuses on safe and responsible boating," said Gail R. Kulp, Executive Director of the Sea Tow Foundation. "From hands-on education and innovative technology to community programs, partnerships, and individual leadership, these efforts are connecting with boaters and helping them become more confident on the water."

The winners of the 2026 National Boating Safety Awards include:

The **Best Boating Safety Education & Training Program** award was presented to [BoatClass](#) for its hands-on boating courses that put participants behind the wheel with certified captains to practice boat handling, docking, navigation, anchoring, VHF use and emergency response. Offered at more than 40 locations across the U.S. and Canada, BoatClass trained 440 boaters during the past year, providing approximately 1,300 hours of on-water instruction. The program stood out for bridging the gap between classroom education and real-world boating experience.

The **Best Youth Boating Safety Initiative** award was presented to [SUNY Maritime College](#) for its Maritime Adventure Boat Camp. Through multiple two-week summer sessions, the program introduces youth, many with little or no previous boating experience, to powerboating, sailing, kayaking, swimming and marine education. Approximately 90 to 100 campers earn their New York State Boating Safety Certificates each summer, combining meaningful on-water experiences with formal safety education.

The **Best Boating Safety Community Engagement Program** award was presented to [Sawyer Paddles and Oars](#) for *Fit to Float*, a statewide life jacket education initiative developed with the Oregon State Marine Board and community partners. The three-month multimedia campaign culminated in a statewide day of in-person fitting events at eight locations, helping paddlers and families learn not only why life jackets should be worn, but how to choose and properly fit one.

The **Best Boating Safety Digital Initiative** award was presented to [The Qualified Captain](#) for its new NASBLA-approved online boating safety course. Using actual boating scenarios, videos, case studies, animations and expert insights, the course connects required boating safety instruction with situations boaters may encounter on the water, helping participants understand both the rules and how to apply them in real-world situations. [BoatClass](#) earned runner-up recognition in this category.

The **Best Boating Safety Product or Technology Innovation** award was presented to [Garmin](#) for its OnBoard Wireless Man Overboard Detection and Engine Cutoff System. The system wirelessly monitors up to eight MOB tags and can automatically stop the engine if the captain falls overboard, while a passenger-overboard event can trigger alarms and mark an MOB waypoint on compatible Garmin chartplotters. Garmin also scheduled training for more than 900 certified technicians nationwide to support installation and adoption.

The **Best Boating Safety Partnership/Collaborative Initiative** award was presented to the [U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Paddlecraft Safety Division](#) and [Cross Currents Leadership](#) for the 2026 Spring Auxiliary Training. The four-day program brought together 65 participants from 19 states and resulted in 36 new or updated instructor certifications, while media outreach, educational videos and digital content helped extend the program's reach and strengthen the network of paddlecraft safety educators.

The **Best Marine Dealer Boating Safety Effort** award was presented to [Causeway Marine](#) for its *Become a Better Boater* campaign. The independently owned Jersey Shore dealership hosts monthly New Jersey Boater Safety Certificate courses, connects boaters with local captains for instruction, offers free docking demonstrations and promotes continued boating education. Since 2024, its safety courses have helped more than 400 people earn their certification. [MarineMax Miami](#) earned runner-up recognition in this category.

The **Best Integrated Boating Safety Campaign** award was presented to [ACR Electronics](#) for its campaign educating boaters about Electronic Visual Distress Signaling Devices (eVDSDs), or electronic flares. Soon after the U.S. Coast Guard transitioned to electronic flares aboard its own boats, ACR used earned media, educational content, video, email, social media, advertising and industry outreach to help recreational and commercial

boaters better understand how electronic flares work, their benefits and applicable requirements. [Lakeland Boating Magazine](#) earned runner-up recognition in this category.

The **Best Individual Boating Safety Advocate** award was presented to [John Sewell](#), **Director of Safety for Freedom Boat Club**, for building a comprehensive safety program across 170 locations in 11 states and two countries. Sewell developed training, reporting systems, a Safety Champion network, hazard-identification programs and a direct feedback loop to boat manufacturers. Freedom Boat Club has since reported a 41% year-over-year reduction in boarding and exiting injuries, more than 4,500 safety observations and coaching conversations, and safety-focused orientation for more than 11,000 new boaters annually.

Among this year's category winners, [SUNY Maritime College](#) was selected to receive the **Boating Safety Excellence Award**, the Sea Tow Foundation's highest recognition, for its Maritime Adventure Boat Camp and its lasting impact on the future of boating. For nearly two decades, the program has expanded access to boating while building safety into the experience from the beginning, helping develop the next generation of confident, responsible boaters.

For more information about the 2026 National Boating Safety Awards and this year's winners, please visit www.boatingsafety.com/awards.

ABOUT SEA TOW FOUNDATION

The Sea Tow Foundation – a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization - was started in 2007 by Captain Joe Frohnhoefer, founder of Sea Tow Services International, after he witnessed too many preventable accidents and fatalities on the water. Through its flagship programs which include the Life Jacket Loaner Program, Sober Skipper Campaign, and the National Boating Safety Awards, the Sea Tow Foundation strives towards its vision of a world where boaters are safe and responsible.

To learn more, visit boatingsafety.com.

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