



## National Association of State Boating Law Administrators Policy Position on the National Boating Accident Investigation Courses

**Date:** September 10, 2007

**Committee:** Boating Accident Investigation, Reporting and Analysis Committee

### **Background**

NASBLA, with grant assistance from the U.S. Coast Guard, has been offering boating accident investigation seminars to law enforcement officers nationally since 1988. Underwriters Laboratories (UL), with guidance from NASBLA's Boating Accident Investigation, Reporting and Analysis Committee (BAIRAC), previously provided the instructors as well as the course curriculum since the inception of the course. During that time, more than 3500 officers have taken advantage of the opportunity to advance their skills and provide critical data to help shape boating safety regulations across the country.

In response to student evaluations, instructor comments and expert comparisons to similar seminars provided by independent sources, NASBLA decided that an update to the curriculum was necessary. The re-engineering of the curriculum began with the selection of a base corps of instructors. The current instructors hail from all across the country. They have been involved in boating accident investigation and instruction for many years, and were selected based both on their vast knowledge and experience in the field and their abilities as instructors. The re-engineering of the courses was completed in 2001, and the revised curriculum has been offered throughout the United States starting in 2002. The Level I – Comprehensive course continues to include a full day of technical instruction, but the primary change is increased emphasis on the assessment and analysis of physical evidence, and the ability to bring an investigation to a successful conclusion in court. There are two levels of instruction available from NASBLA through the National Boating Accident Investigation and Analysis Course, Level I – Comprehensive, and Level II – Advanced. Since the new program revisions were initiated, the total number of officers having attended the courses has risen to approximately 5,000 nationwide.

Although the National Boating Accident Investigation Courses (both Level I – Comprehensive and Level II – Advanced) have been designed to fit the needs of recreational boating accident investigators of state and local law enforcement agencies, the program has also been recognized by a number of federal agencies as fitting into their training needs. Investigators of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (U.S. Customs and U.S. Border Patrol safety officers, U.S. Coast Guard inspectors and investigators), etc, have attended the NASBLA classes to meet

their agency needs. The program has also gained international recognition, as evidenced by attendance by personnel of Transport Canada (Canadian Coast Guard), and officers of the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Inquiries about the National Boating Accident Investigation Courses have also been received from two other continents – Europe and Australia.

**Level I – Comprehensive** - This course is currently offered at five different geographical locations throughout the United States each year. This course was designed to provide investigating officers with all the tools they need to completely and accurately investigate a recreational boating accident. The Comprehensive course begins with modules on accidents and statistics and vessel construction. Technical instruction is provided on topics such as standards and regulations, electricity, navigational lights, ignition protection, carbon monoxide, fuel systems, fires and explosions and ventilation.

The Comprehensive course also covers diagramming, stability, capacity and loading, collision basics (boat dynamics, evidence collection, damage assessment and analysis, and injury assessment and analysis), memorandums of understanding (MOUs), public relations, personal watercraft, report construction, court preparation, and environmental concerns. The seminar still includes the popular vessel systems examinations and an example of a crashed vessel examination, with students preparing reports and giving presentations to the group on their findings. The seminar concludes on Friday morning with an exam and presentation of certificates. This new course clocks in at 37 hours of instruction, compared to 32 hours of instruction in the previous course. The additional five hours of instruction were necessary to cover all the topics that were not included previously, but the curriculum development team still struggled to include everything and keep the course to a reasonable length.

**Level II – Advanced** - The Advanced course is currently offered once each year, and is currently offered at the NTSB training facility in Ashburn, Virginia. This course contains a minimum of 36 hours of instruction, with the primary emphasis being the reconstruction of recreational boat collisions, based solely on physical evidence. Each student is provided the opportunity to assess and analyze physical collision damage evidence on multiple boats. Also included are modules dealing with special topics of current interest, which are designed to keep law enforcement officers up-to-date with the latest problems, technologies, and/or advances in boating accident investigation, reconstruction, and analysis.

With the conclusion of a new round of staged boat collisions, and the resulting availability of additional boats and training aids, NASBLA hopes to expand the Level II – Advanced course to offer an additional class annually. The goal is to establish an additional permanent location in the western part of the United States, so that officers have two options available, both in time frame and in location. Officers attending both courses are also issued an extensive manual of course text materials and their own copy of the National Boating Accident Investigation Field Guide, which provides crucial reference material to assist them in future boating accident investigations.

## **National Association of State Boating Law Administrators Policy**

The National Association of State Boating Law Administrators endorses and encourages attendance at both levels of the NASBLA National Boating Accident Investigation and Analysis Course by officers that are responsible for investigating boating accidents. Officers attending the Level I - Comprehensive course will be more prepared to conduct thorough and detailed investigations of boating accidents, facilitating criminal prosecution, when appropriate, and ensuring accurate determination of data and contributing causes necessary for the Boating Accident Reporting Data Base. Officers who complete the Level II – Advanced course enhance not only their investigative skills, but leave the course qualified to reconstruct recreational boating accidents.

Even though the emphasis of the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators is to administer the boating accident investigation courses under a grant provided by the U.S. Coast Guard, it is also intended to be the template for boating accident investigation courses administered by any law enforcement agency that investigates boating accidents. Through NASBLA's new Training Certification Program, NASBLA will expand the exposure of the Level I and Level II National Boating Accident Investigation Courses by allowing "Training Partner" agencies and/or organizations to deliver the entire course through the use of their own instructors, who will be certified by NASBLA. This new Training Certification Program will not only expand the delivery of the course, it will also increase the stature and significance of the entire NASBLA boating accident investigation program.

### **Policy References**

NASBLA Website at [www.nasbla.org](http://www.nasbla.org)

NASBLA Resolutions

BAIRAC committee minutes and comments (1999 to 2007)

NASBLA National Boating Accident Investigation and Analysis Course Student Manual

NASBLA National Boating Accident Investigation Field Guide

### **Policy Letters**

None associated with this issue.