



K69 Caught Looking: A High-Profile Vessel-Related Fatality in Miami, Florida

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the role and importance of toxicology testing in the investigation of vessel-related fatalities.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by emphasizing the importance of the toxicological investigation and the role of drug impairment in vessel-related fatalities.

According to the Boating Accidents Statistical Report issued by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation and Commission, the State of Florida has averaged 56 vessel-related fatalities per year since 2009. Miami-Dade County, located in the southeastern part of the state, ranks high among the top ten Florida counties in which boating incidences occur. Miami is a city defined by water with boating and salt life very much a part of its culture. Whether fishing, snorkeling, scuba diving, or sunbathing, enjoying time on a boat is an everyday, year-round pastime that requires very little experience but offers an atmosphere conducive for “partying” and drinking alcoholic beverages. Unfortunately, this combination resulted in a high-profile fatality in Miami involving a Major League baseball player and two additional passengers.

The three men were known to be socializing and having drinks at a popular bar on South Beach. They left the establishment and boarded a 32-foot SeaVee® center console. The vessel began traveling from the Atlantic Ocean when it collided into a jetty as it attempted to enter the channel at a very high rate of speed. Autopsies completed determined blunt force trauma and drowning as the cause of death for all three occupants. The captain of the vessel had an iliac blood ethanol concentration of 0.147% and a cocaine and benzoylecgonine concentration of 0.126mg/L and 0.282mg/L, respectively. The second passenger had an iliac blood ethanol concentration of 0.065% and cocaine and benzoylecgonine of 0.077mg/L and 0.482mg/L, respectively. Both decedents with cocaine identified also had cocaethylene present at a level below the limit of quantitation (0.050mg/L) for the method. The third passenger had an iliac blood ethanol of 0.044% with only citalopram detected. The toxicology findings determined that ethanol and drugs were a factor in this boating accident. Overall, it was concluded that the vessel captain operated with his normal faculties impaired, in a reckless manner, at an extremely high rate of speed. The combination of ethanol and cocaine, at night, in an area with known navigational hazards such as the rock jetties and channel markers contributed to the fatal accident.

Toxicology testing is important in vessel-related fatalities for determining the presence or absence of impairing substances and can help in understanding the circumstances surrounding boating accidents. In this particular case, multiple factors were at play, including speed, darkness, navigational hazards, and impairment due to alcohol and drugs.

Boating, Vessel Fatality, Toxicology