

Unregulated Waters: The Legal Gaps Behind Summer's Rising Body Count

As fatalities rise on Georgia waters, legal gaps and unregulated rentals expose families to deadly risks—and zero accountability.

ATLANTA, GA, UNITED STATES, May 14, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As temperatures rise and

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crowds flock to Georgia's lakes, the boating season is bringing more than just summer fun—it's becoming increasingly deadly. From Lake Lanier to Lake Allatoona, a troubling surge in accidents has experts raising alarms over impaired operation, lack of regulation, and limited enforcement capacity.

According to the [Georgia Department of Natural Resources](#)

[\(DNR\)](#), there were over 275 Boating Under the Influence (BUI) charges in 2023 alone, a stark reminder of how frequently safety is compromised on the water. In the same year, Georgia recorded 16 boating-related deaths and 53 drownings. Preliminary figures for 2024 suggest a similarly grim trend, with at least 16 boating fatalities already—including three reported drownings at Lake Lanier.

Many of these tragedies involved the use of alcohol, and almost every single one of these incidents was preventable. Over July 4 weekend in 2024, 27 Boating under the influence tickets were issued.

Boats Aren't Toys—They're Deadly Machines

“Too often, crashes and injuries on Georgia lakes result from poor safety protocols, miscommunication, or intoxication. Boats aren't toys—they're deadly machines operated in crowded, unregulated spaces. And too many victims are left without any legal recourse.” says Matt Kahn, Personal Injury Attorney at Butler Kahn

One such case [involved a woman who suffered a catastrophic injury](#) while using a rented pontoon boat on Lake Lanier. During a Labor Day weekend outing, she was reassured multiple times that the boat's engine was off. While re-entering the water, she was struck by the propeller—resulting in the loss of her leg. Witness accounts confirmed she had followed all safety precautions.

That injury occurred not because of recklessness on her part, but because of misinformation and unsafe boating practices that could have been avoided. The case underscores the often-overlooked dangers posed by insufficient training and unclear equipment use on rental vessels.

Legal Gray Zones: Who's Liable?

Current Georgia law does not require boat owners to carry liability insurance. This loophole often leaves injured victims or grieving families without compensation or legal options. In many cases, victims only discover the lack of coverage after an accident occurs.

Additionally, penalties for BUI remain lighter than those for DUI, raising concerns about deterrence. While drunk drivers on the road may lose their license or face jail time, boat operators often receive a misdemeanor and a fine.

Another growing risk is the rise of unregulated “party boats”—chartered vessels that operate without proper permits or oversight. These boats are frequently rented online and lack basic safety equipment or trained crew. Several recent collisions and drownings have been linked to such vessels.

Officials from the Georgia DNR have acknowledged resource constraints, which limit the frequency of safety inspections and BUI checkpoints. The agency has fewer than 200 law enforcement rangers tasked with monitoring all of Georgia’s vast water systems—far from sufficient during peak summer weekends.

“We can’t expect families to navigate these risks alone,” Kahn notes. “The system is built in a way that protects negligent parties more than the people they harm.”

Beyond the immediate dangers on the water, Georgia’s current legal framework presents serious challenges for victims of boating accidents seeking justice. Key gaps include weaker BUI penalties than DUI, no required safety training, and no oversight of commercial party boat operations. Until state law mandates basic protections, more families will face devastating injuries with nowhere to turn.

A Cautionary Summer Ahead

This summer, with thousands expected to hit the water, the conditions are ripe for further tragedy unless public awareness, regulatory action, and enforcement all increase. The question remains: who is responsible when preventable accidents occur—and how many more lives will be lost before change happens?

About Matt

Matt Kahn is a top-rated personal injury lawyer and partner at Butler Kahn, one of Atlanta’s leading law firms for wrongful death and catastrophic injury cases. Recognized for his results-driven approach and relentless advocacy, Matt represents individuals and families across Georgia who have suffered life-altering injuries or the loss of a loved one due to someone else’s negligence. Since joining Butler Kahn in 2019, Matt has helped secure justice in high-stakes cases

involving car accidents, truck crashes, and complex wrongful death claims. In 2024, he was honored as one of the Daily Report's "On the Rise" attorneys, highlighting him as one of the top lawyers under 40 in the Southeast. Known for his strategic litigation skills, compassion for clients, and courtroom success, Matt is a go-to choice for those seeking elite personal injury representation in Georgia. Learn more at <https://butlerfirm.com/our-team/matt-kahn/>

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