

Don't let alcohol ruin summer fun

By Cate Neal

Summer around Tahoe is the perfect time for outdoor activities with family and friends. For some, drinking alcoholic beverages is part of the fun-in-the-sun experience. But excessive alcohol consumption and summer activities don't mix.



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The American College of Surgeons Committee on Trauma reports alcohol plays a role in half of all trauma-related injuries. According to the Centers for Disease Control, alcohol relates to 70 percent of water recreation deaths and 48 percent of pedestrian fatalities.

Here are a few scenarios for how alcohol can lead to tragic consequences on the water, on the road, and in the outdoors – and how you can avoid a tragedy.

The sensational swimmer

Alcohol decreases inhibition and impairs mental and physical capabilities, a risky combination for swimmers. In the frigid Lake Tahoe waters, a seasoned swimmer who's had a few drinks may foolishly venture out too far. A leg cramp makes it difficult to return to shore and even a chill can develop into hypothermia. Avoid going far from shore and stay within a

beach's designated swimming zone.

The boastful boater

Boating and drinking are not a healthy cocktail. Alcohol impairs judgment, balance, and vision. It decreases reaction time and increases fatigue. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism reports 60 percent of boating fatalities involved alcohol and a boat operator with blood alcohol concentration of at least 0.1 percent is 16 times more likely to die in a boating accident than a sober operator. Drinking passengers are also more likely to slip on the deck or fall overboard.

The distracted driver

Summer vacation drivers are out in force. Many are unfamiliar with the roads and have other distractions, such as hauling a boat or camper, or dealing with children and pets in the backseat. Adding alcohol puts the driver and passengers as well as other drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists in harm's way. Thirty-one percent of vehicle crash fatalities, the CDC states, were connected to alcohol consumption in 2013.

The inebriated trail user

On the trail, heat exposure and alcohol can create trouble. Hot summer days increases sweat and alcohol causes additional fluid loss from increased urination. Together, excessive water loss can quickly lead to dehydration or heat stroke. Stay hydrated. Drink ample cold, non-alcoholic drinks when hiking or biking.

The sober survivor

The easiest safety tip is to avoid drinking, particularly in the risky situations suggested above. Or, if you do drink, find a sober driver, drink plenty of water, and avoid operating any motorized vehicle.

Barton Health is committed to keeping our community and visitors safe. One example in place is the Alcohol Screening and Brief Intervention (SBI) program. Patients admitted with a trauma-related injury, such as a concussion or broken limb, complete a brief questionnaire on their drinking habits. Depending on the score, patients receive a counseling session regarding drinking behavior and how it may be related to the injury.

“Teachable moments” like this following a trauma incident greatly reduce hazardous drinking habits. Alcohol SBI program participants experience fewer DUI arrests, healthcare costs, and hospital visits related to drinking. In the long run, less trauma incidents also make Tahoe safer for all to enjoy.

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