

Broward moves ahead of Keys as leader in boating accidents

▶ BOATING, FROM 1B

visiting boaters down there. The real headline here is that boating accidents are down in Florida on the whole.”

Palm Beach County, with 95 accidents, and Miami-Dade, with 80, rounded out the top four counties on the list. Both had nearly twice as many registered vessels as Monroe.

For the first time in at least a decade, though, Florida’s waterways were not the deadliest in the nation. Texas, with 52 fatalities, and California, with 51, topped the list, followed by Florida with 46,

down 12 from 1999.

Broward actually had 2 fewer reported accidents in 2000 than in 1999.

Marine officials say increased boat patrols and boating safety courses are helping to decrease boating accidents and fatalities, including those occurring on personal watercraft like Jet Skis and Waverunners.

Last year, personal watercraft accidents statewide were at a seven-year low of 382, accounting for 32 percent of all water mishaps. Of those, 74 percent were on personal watercraft that were rented or

borrowed, indicating that many of those injured are often uneducated first-time boaters.

State officials expect the number of boating accidents to continue to drop — in large part because of a 1996 state law requiring young boaters to take boating safety classes. The spinoff effect is that parents also have taken the classes, Ouellette believes.

“Many people used to look at boating as the last bastion of freedom, where it was the only place they could go and have a beer and be left alone. I think that mentality is changing — and it’s saving lives,” he said.