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Bill Cuts Alcohol Limits For Boaters

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Iowa's blood-alcohol limit for boat operators will probably be lowered this year from .10 to .08, key lawmakers said Tuesday.

If approved, the law for boaters would match the blood-alcohol limit for operating a motor vehicle. Supporters, who have worked on the bill for years, said the change is necessary to help save lives.

Senate File 3 passed the Senate Natural Resources Committee on Tuesday and is eligible for debate by the full Senate.

It then would need House approval and the governor's signature to become law. House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, D-Des Moines, said Tuesday that he and his party are likely on board with the proposal. "My prediction is we'll have a .08 law for boating passed by the end of the year," McCarthy said.

The Senate and House have both passed versions of the bill during the past two years. Lawmakers disagreed on various points, including who is considered a boat "operator" and under what conditions a boat is defined as operational.

The drunken boating proposal gained momentum after Perry dentist Michael Brosnahan was killed in an accident caused by a drunken boater on Okoboji Lake in 2005.

Members of the Iowa Great Lakes Water Safety Council have lobbied aggressively for the law. Phil Petersen of the council said his members believed McCarthy was an obstacle to the bill's passage in past years. He said the council was pleased to hear the measure has a shot this year.

"This law would help the general public realize it's just as dangerous to drive a 4,000-pound boat at .08 as a 4,000-pound vehicle," Petersen said.

Drunken-boating violations do not count against driving records. Intoxicated boat operators can be charged with a simple misdemeanor for the first offense, which carries a fine of up to \$1,000, two days in jail and loss of their boat licenses for a year.

Sen. Merlin Bartz, a Republican from Grafton, cast the only vote against Senate File 3 in committee on Tuesday. He said he has seen no evidence that lowering the limit would save lives.

"I just have a real problem with the logic as to why it needs to be lowered when there's no data giving me indication that it needs to be," Bartz said.