



The captain's first and primary responsibility is for the safety of the vessel, passengers and crew. **A prudent skipper always conducts a safety briefing prior to departure.** At a minimum, the following should be covered with all passengers:

- Boarding and disembarking safely
- Location, proper adjustment and use of PFDs
- Location and use of fire extinguishers
- Deck hazards such as cleats and slippery surfaces
- Underway safety including location of secure handholds, proper seating areas (no riding on bow or sitting on gunwales, seat backs, etc.) and dangers related to vessel motion such as powering up, slowing down/stopping and turning.

**Life Jackets are essential.** Life jackets are at the core of safe boating, whether using a motorized or non-motorized vessel. *Almost 80% of boating accident fatalities result from drowning.* Always wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket. Make sure the jacket is a proper fit for your size and weight. Make sure the jacket is properly fastened. Good swimmers still need life jackets - when people fall off a boat, they may become disoriented, injured or unconscious. Wear it, don't stow it. Tucked-away life jackets are useless in an accident.

**Never drink alcohol** while boating. Alcohol affects judgment, vision, balance and coordination. Keep in mind that the sun, wind and boat vibration can accelerate impairment. Be responsible and carry non-alcoholic drinks.

**Protect against propeller strikes.** Make sure all passengers are accounted for before starting the engine, and wear your emergency cut-off switch at all times. When people are in the water, turn-off the engines, better yet, remove keys from the ignition, and ask one person to "propeller-watch".

**Know what to do if someone goes overboard.** If the boat capsizes or someone falls overboard, follow these boating safety tips:

- **Turn off the motor and propellers.** If someone is still on the boat, have them turn them off. If everyone has gone overboard and the motor or propellers are still on, your first priority should be to get everyone away from the boat.
- **Remain calm.** If you're wearing a life jacket, float without using too much energy and check to make sure everyone else is safe. If you're not wearing a life jacket, look for a life jacket or other floating safety device. Don't try to remove clothing or footwear. Air trapped in clothing can provide additional floatation. If you're

wearing a life jacket, keep it on. Float on your back and paddle slowly and calmly to help others to safety.

**Carry safety equipment** on board. On top of life jackets for all, stock a complete first-aid kit, a tool kit, a horn or whistle, flares, a fire extinguisher, a marine VHF radio, a cell phone in a waterproof case, an extra dock line or two and a throwable flotation device, at a minimum. Remember sunscreen and know the signs of heat illnesses. Bring dry clothes and blankets in case of hypothermia.

**Check your equipment** and make sure it is in good working order.

**Review a pre-departure checklist** to ensure you have everything you need in your boat.

**Make a float plan** and be sure to give it to someone.

**Review all the navigational rules** and make sure you understand them.

**Don't overload the boat** with people or equipment. Always follow your boat's capacity restriction and make sure that passengers stay safely within the boat's railings.

**Check the weather** beforehand. Once on the water, the weather can turn. If you notice storm clouds, a sudden temperature drop or wind speed increasing, play it safe and get off the water.

**Follow proper anchoring** procedures. Having the right anchor isn't enough. To keep the wind from dragging your boat, you may need to drop two anchors in a V-formation at the front of the craft to keep it from drifting. To help prevent the tide from lifting your anchor, you may need to drop it in deeper water – about 20-30 feet or so.

**Follow proper docking** procedures. Depending on the wind, the current and your type of boat, docking can be a challenge. As you approach the dock or shore, make sure your bumpers are out to prevent damage to your craft, reduce your speed and make sure the docking lines are secured.

**Check for harmful fumes** and maintain fresh air circulation throughout the boat. After refueling your boat, open all the hatches and smell for fumes. If detected, don't start the engine. Carbon monoxide can accumulate in and around your boat - be aware of all the places fumes and gases can accumulate.

**Never swim in a marina** or in other areas where boats are connected to shore power. Stray power in the water can create an electric shock hazard.

**Designate an Assistant Skipper.** Make sure more than one person onboard is familiar with all aspects of the boat's handling, operations, and general boating safety, in case

the primary operator is incapacitated and someone else needs to get the boat back to shore.

**Use caution with water sports.** Skiing, tubing and wakeboarding are popular water sports, but they also can be dangerous with participants traveling at high speeds. Remember to always have a spotter in the boat, and go over basic hand signals. Make sure the propeller is stopped before getting back on the boat. Enjoy these activities during daylight hours only.

Always maintain “**3 Points of Contact**” when moving about the vessel.

**Maintain “situational awareness”.** Be aware of objects and other people, including stationed anglers, swimmers, boaters, kayakers and paddleboarders in the water. Watch for debris in the water. Have someone keep a look-out. Keep your wake low when near other boats, swimmers, or the shore.

**Take a boat safety course.** The U.S. Coast Guard estimates that 70% of boating accidents are caused by operator error. Before you leave the dock, make sure you know the rules and your responsibilities.

**And always exercise good judgment** – use common sense - respect your limits and keep within your limits to avoid injury.