



NY Fire Consultants, Inc. Fire Safety Message

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Small Boat Safety

Fire on Board

Fire aboard a boat can be a terrifying experience. A person may only have a split second to act to save themselves and all passengers. The importance of having fully charged fire extinguishers on hand is vital.

Most boat fires can be put out rapidly if you act immediately. Do not hesitate. If a fire starts, grab the extinguisher, activate it and direct it at the base of the flames. Use short bursts and sweep it from side to side. Do not wait until a fire starts to read the directions on the label. Take the time to make sure that you and those who boat with you regularly know and understand exactly how to use the fire extinguisher.

There are several preventable measures to take in order to avoid most boat fires:

- ✓ Clean bilges often and maintain proper gear stowage.
- ✓ Make sure short-tie cables are properly connected.
- ✓ Place oily rags in covered trash cans or dispose of them on shore.
- ✓ Store propane fuel for stoves in a secure area.

If and when a fire does break out on board your boat, never use water on fires started electrically, by gasoline, oil, or grease. Water will spread a gasoline fire and since water is a conductor of electricity, you may receive a damaging shock from an electrical fire.

Water should only be used to extinguish burning wood, mattresses, rags, rubbish, and alcohol. When extinguishing the fire, make sure it is completely out. If not, it may smolder for a long while and possibly start again. If possible, soak burning materials over the downwind side of the boat. Also remember to avoid littering the waterways by removing any debris after the emergency is over.

Follow these steps if fire breaks out while you are underway in order to prevent the fire from spreading to other parts of the boat:

- ✓ Slow or stop the boat. Wind from the boat's motion feeds the flames. Keep the fire downwind. If the fire is aft, head the bow into the wind. If forward, put the stern into the wind.
- ✓ If the motor catches fire, shut off the fuel supply immediately.
- ✓ Always remember not to panic. Many boats burn to the water line because people jump overboard without assessing the situation first. If you realize that the fire cannot be put out with the fire extinguisher, put on your life jacket and exit the boat upwind of the burning craft. Use a radio, cellular phone, or visual distress signals to gain assistance.

Boating under the influence

The affects of alcohol on a person while boating can be devastating. Waterways are second only to highways when it comes to accidental deaths. Alcohol is a major contributing factor in recreational boating casualties. A boat operator with a blood alcohol concentration above .10 is ten times more likely to be killed in a boating accident than a boater with zero blood alcohol concentration. Alcohol affects your balance, vision, judgment and coordination. Research has shown that alcohol, combined with boating stressors, such as sun, wind, noise, vibration and motion, can impair a person much faster than alcohol consumption on land. Passengers are also at risk-more than half of all boating fatalities are the result of a boater falling overboard, not operator error. Drinking alcohol produces certain physiological responses that directly affect the safety of everyone around the water.

Such responses include:

- ✓ Diminished judgment, motor skills, peripheral vision, balance, and the ability to process information.
- ✓ Slowed reaction and reflexive response time.
- ✓ Reduced depth perception, night vision and focus.
- ✓ An inner ear disturbance, which can make it impossible for someone suddenly immersed in water to distinguish up from down.
- ✓ An accelerated onset of hypothermia, if a person has been consuming alcohol and is immersed in water.
- ✓ Increased alcohol absorption-for every 18-degree increase in air temperature (above room temperature) the body's absorption rate for alcohol doubles. That means that alcohol is absorbed twice as fast at 93 degrees than at 75 degrees.

Take all precautions necessary in order to ensure a safe boating trip.

Some tips to prevent boating injuries and fatalities:

- ✓ Wear life jackets.
- ✓ Don't drink alcohol
- ✓ File a float plan; tell people when you are leaving, where you're going and when you'll return.
- ✓ Be weather wise. Check the forecast before you go and bring a radio to regularly check weather reports.
- ✓ Don't overload the boat with too many passengers or equipment.
- ✓ Take a boating safety course to learn the rules of the water.
- ✓ Enjoy the water, and boat safe!

Sobering Numbers

- Eight hundred or more people die in boating accidents every year.
- More than 80% of them drown. Drowning is the third leading cause of accidental death in the U.S.
- About half of all boating fatalities involve alcohol.
- The U.S. Coast Guard estimates the number of non-fatal boating accidents to be 60,000 or higher with property damage well over \$240 million annually.
- Each year- from 1961, when statistics were first kept, through 1992- boating accidents have claimed over 800 lives, more than in airplane or train accidents, and have injured thousands more. Waterways are second only to highways as the scene of accidental deaths in the country. The Coast Guard and the U.S. Congress recognize alcohol as a significant problem on the water.

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