

BOAT SAFETY

Off normal

Safety has become one of those things you can't be against like motherhood or apple pie. However, I have never been one to eschew risk so I am going to talk about it in an off normal manner. I am not sure I fine the trend over the past thirty years, healthy. In order to explain let me give you a few things to think about.

Safety is a modern Concept

Safety is a modern concept. Safety is not basic to the evolution of the life in the universe. Dinosaurs did wear headgear. Safety is not in the bible; David wasn't required to wear eye protection when using the sling. Safety is not in the constitution; freedom from harm is not one of the unalienable rights. For example, one doesn't find seat belts on covered wagons. Nor did the pioneers buy Indian insurance before coming west.

Safety gradually became an issue over the last 50 years, and has accelerated dramatically and maybe now totally out of control. You have to admit that it is getting a little ridiculous when gun manufactures are required to label their product telling people that putting the gun in the mouth and pulling the trigger can cause serious injury.

Government Involved

Somewhere around the late 40's early 50's, the government and consumer groups got involved. Both of these types of organizations are self-perpetuating. That is the more "problems" they can find the more successful they are. This spawned the safety industry. What a scam. Building and selling a product that the government requires you to buy. Like helmets, or life vests, etc.

Is that bad? Maybe People get the idea that safety is involved in purchasing the correct equipment. People get to believe that some one else is responsible for their safety. The government, manufactures, employers everyone but themselves. This is wrong. They are given the idea that every accident is preventable. This is wrong. Because we are dealing with people.

I worked on a construction job where we had to fill out detailed accident reports on every mishap. Based on this high sounding concept. Part of the form required you to explain how you were going to prevent the accident in the future. A truck driver noticed his engine overheating, so he stop his truck and removed the radiator cap burning his hand. There were warnings on the radiator and hood telling him to wait until the engine was cool before removing the cap. We spent considerable time arguing with the governmental agency involved as to how we were going to prevent this accident in the future and finally settle on "Don't hire stupid drivers."

In fact if you analysis most accidents they all boil down to one harsh word "stupidity." I cut myself with an ax once clearing brush. I needed to cut a protruding branch off a tree

with very little clearance to swing the ax. So, I decided to use short forward and backstrokes with a double bladed ax. The dumb part was putting my knee in the same hole so I could gain leverage. As a Result, I cut myself badly on the return stroke. Not one of the smartest things I have ever done.

Sure Ok but what about bad Luck

Ok but How about just plan bad luck. Well there is no such thing as bad luck. Only luck! Luck is made good or bad by the individual.

I know of a boater who left Japan bound for San Francisco in June. They were hit with a typhoon rolled over a couple of time spilling much of his equipment overboard, dismasting the boat and disabling the engine. He floated north for weeks until he was picked up by a fishing vessel and towed into Adak. Bad Luck? I don't think so. He left Japan to cross the worlds most prolific hurricane belt in the height of hurricane seasons, where there are on the average of five hurricanes month. Since hurricanes, last 10 days there are at least two blowing at all times in this area. It would have been extraordinary luck to get through without hitting a major storm.

What there is

What there is, is bad preparation, bad planning, bad judgment, stupidity and a lot of it.

Let me give you another example: In the 1980's a young man and his family left Portland for a drive in the mountains one warm November day. They got into the cascades and onto some very poor roads before the weather turned bad. They were caught in a snowstorm and ended up sliding into the ditch far from the main road. Turns out they had no chains, no winter clothing, car is warm and very little else. After working for hours to get the car going again, he decided to go for help. He made it but on returning both his wife and child were dead of exposure. Certainly a sad story, but the reporter found that the individual had made some 30 odd decisions any one of which had he made correctly tragedy would have been averted.

So how do we get good luck

We make it by using good preparation, good planning and good judgment. A safe boater doesn't need a life vest. Hey your not suppose to say that, because then somebody will falsely think they are a safe boater and do something stupid were a life vest may come in handy. To bad! They die! Getting rid of the dumb ones might improve the specie in the long run.

You know other animals are faster, or stronger, are claim to fame is supposed to be that we are smarter. Well use that smartness get educated, get prepared.

GOOD PREPARATION

The easiest way to get prepared is by reading, articles and books on boating subjects. If my friend had read anything about weather, he would have known about the hurricane belt and may have changed his plans. For those who don't like to read there are short courses and seminar available. USCGA or the Power Squadron offers a couple. Then

there is just conversation about boating along the dock with other boaters. Finally, once you get the basics get to Carnage Hall. Practice, practice, practice.

GOOD PLANNING

Good planning starts with good preparation. Research your task or voyage. Think over the whole operation from start to finish. Quick thinking is a myth. I know an individual whose brakes failed and he quickly stopped the car by putting it in low gear and turning off the key. When I commented on his quick thinking on the key, he said that he had thought through the problem earlier.

Take small steps. You don't have to round the Horn on your first passage. Don't start by going through rapids. Try Dodd narrows first. Many boating experience lend themselves to gradual learning.

Along the way pick up self-reliance. There is a common tendency to assume anybody from out of town is an expert. The guy who comes up to help you may know less than you. A bungled rescue can add to your problems. First, look to what you can do.

I was sailing down the Georgia Straits about 10 miles off the mouth of the Frazier river when I heard a Mayday on the VHF. Since I was so close, I altered course and monitored the transmission. The individual had engine failure and was drifting back onto the banks of the river. The Coast Guard asked for a description of the boat so they could send help. He was a 35-foot, white sailboat. Sailboat! We were sailing in along at 5 knots only a few miles from his position. I broken in and asked him if he had tried sailing. There was a long pause, then he came back with "never mind."

When trouble strikes many people instinctively think of calling someone else for help. This course hopefully will allow you to solve your own problems quickly and safely.