







SAFETY AWARENESS ABOARD

BY BOB ARRINGTON

There is an often quoted statistic stating: "Most boating accidents occur within 3 miles of your home port." In studying accident records, I identified four reasons for this:

-  **A boater left port with the problem on board and pending**
-  **Accidents caused by fatigue after a long day underway**
-  **Inherent risk of ocean inlets**
-  **Majority of recreational boating consists of day trips close to home**

While boating accidents fall into numerous categories, many of which are related, there is one skill which can prevent most of them. That is "a keen and skilled sense of awareness." For some people the "keen" part is second nature, while others may have to practice it, but all can learn it. The "skilled" part has to be learned by all of us. If you were lucky enough to grow up on your family's boat, you may feel as if you were born with the skills. If you are new to boating, the learning can be a little more difficult but equally rewarding.

So where does this awareness begin? Mine begins with detailed lists. Lists help me remember what to look for, and the more I look the more I'm aware, the more I practice awareness the more I see. It's essential to make a list of what to do prior to getting underway.

There are frequent analogies made between piloting an aircraft and piloting a boat, both place you at the mercy of the elements in a medium foreign to our bodies. Now being suspended in air may be a tad more precarious than being on the water, when things start to go wrong, they typically can only get worse. For this reason an aircraft pilot wouldn't dream of taking off without performing a pre-flight checklist. The concepts of pre-flight checklists were introduced by Boeing Corporation after a 1935 fatal plane crash. The pilots had forgotten an

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- illness**
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important item prior to taking off. Checklists can help the pilot of any craft address issues while still safely tethered to earth or tied to the pier.


As boaters, checklists help us review information in a specific and orderly manner so we can make "pull out" or "stay-put" decisions and be well-prepared once underway. While checklists help us review critical systems on board the boat, they also should be internally reflective. When using our boats we would do well to follow one of the most important parts of a pilot's checklist. The I.M.S.A.F.E. acronym, where each letter stands for: illness, medication, stress and or external pressures, alcohol/drugs, fatigue and emotion. Any one of these items can contribute to trouble on the water, however, "External Pressures" can


be one of the most hazardous. The guests are here, the drinks are cold, so what if the weather is turning a little — for the worst. Strict adherence to a plan in the face of deteriorating conditions has been the ruin of many voyages.

Many accidents on a boat follow a predictable path of accelerated severity, with a seemingly simple problem quickly accelerating into a catastrophe. It's best to remember a familiar saying which most fittingly applies to boating: "There is a time in the life of every problem when it was big enough to see but still small enough to solve."

Examples:

-  Let's pick up that boat hook left on the foredeck before it becomes a bruised knee from tripping over it or worse a person overboard situation.
-  Notice that small spot of soot on the exhaust riser during our engine room inspection before the clamp fails completely, filling the engine room with exhaust causing you to shut down the engine just as you're accelerating out of the inlet.

-  Secure all cabinets and hatches before getting underway so we're not distracted at the wrong time.

-  Be aware of other boats around us at all times and preparing our reaction to their lack of attentiveness.

Operating a boat safely also requires equipping the boat with the necessary safety items. The Coast Guard provides us with requirements for a minimal number of safety items, but if you venture out with no more than the Coast Guard list, you are underprepared for most emergencies. A well-equipped boat includes engine and system spares to keep the boat from becoming idled in a dangerous situation. Also, damage control components to stop a leak in the event of a thru-hull failure or worse a hull breach from a grounding or collision. A proper first aid kit to handle physical injuries. Lastly, redundant navigation information and back up communication equipment.

Much has been written about "Situational" awareness or what we will call "Safety" awareness and the skills learned in it can be

directly applied to keeping us safe on the water. This heightened sense of awareness also brings enjoyment as well as safety. So prepare your ship, check your lists, then cast off the lines with a keen awareness for all of the adventure we seek in this wonderful pastime of ours. *ml*


Capt. Bob Arrington, a licensed U.S.C.G. Master, in addition to contributing to MarinaLife Magazine runs "Ocean Enterprises" a maritime business offering buyer and delivery services, vessel handling and navigational instruction. He has 34 years boating experience on the Great Lakes, Chesapeake Bay and off-shore waters of the U.S. Atlantic Seaboard and Caribbean. He and his wife Dori work out of Baltimore Maryland and Oriental North Carolina when not cruising aboard their Ocean Alexander 54 Trawler. He can be reached at: bobarrington@comcast.net

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251-981-3700
saundersyacht.com
sy@saundersyacht.com