Greystones Sailing Club

Safety for yourself and the crew on a Yacht

The best piece of safety kit you have is you. Keep a clear head so you can react to any situation.

Look after you

Keeping warm and dry is important. Once you start to get cold your ability to think and function properly will deteriorate.

Wear clothes made from man-made fabrics rather than cotton which soaks up body moisture and makes you cold. Always take spare clothing with you so you can add layers if necessary as well as a waterproof jacket and trousers, and a hat.

Conversely in hot weather remember your sun cream and hat and keep yourself hydrated.

Safety briefing for your crew

A skipper should ensure that everyone on board knows where the safety equipment is stowed and how to use it. Talk them through your plan as well as your contingency plans should something go wrong. Other aspects are: check that they know how to start the engine, how to send a Mayday, make them aware of any on board hazards, make sure they know MOB drill

Man overboard drill (MOB)

Shout ‘man overboard’ to alert the crew.

Press the MOB button on the GPS if you have one.

Throw a life buoy to the MOB.

Allocate a crewmember to point at the MOB in the water.

Send a DSC distress alert and a Mayday.

Keep pointing; don’t lose sight of the MOB.

Sails down, start engine.

Prepare a throwing line.

Skipper brings the boat alongside the MOB, with the boat pointing into the wind and the propeller stopped.

Get a line around the MOB and get them aboard. Use a halyard and winch aboard if necessary.

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Cold water shock can kill

Cold water shock occurs well before the effects of hypothermia and so it is far deadlier. It can cause a number of instant and powerful involuntary respiratory reflexes that can lead to death in minutes. It can happen at any time of the year; it only takes a water temperature of 15°C and below. If a crew member is wet, keep them warm. Get ashore asap if they can't be warmed up quickly.

Alcohol and sailing don't mix

Alcohol will impair your coordination and your ability to think clearly, particularly in an emergency situation. It influences your behaviour and affects your judgement.

Care should also be taken when at anchor, transferring to and from a tender or when walking to and from a boat along a pontoon.

Lifejacket or buoyancy aid

Make sure you and your crew have the right personal safety equipment, that they are well maintained and fitted correctly.

What is the difference between buoyancy aids and lifejackets?

Buoyancy aids are simply that - an aid to buoyancy that generally relies on help being close at hand.

It assumes that the wearer is able to help themselves to some by swimming to safety or by keeping themselves afloat while assistance arrives if required.

Buoyancy aids are suitable for personal watercraft (PWC), dinghies, windsurfing and generally for activities where the wearer might reasonably expect to end up in the water.

A **lifejacket** is intended for use where a high standard of performance is required. It will turn an unconscious person into a safe position and requires no subsequent action by the user to maintain this position.

You should consider whether an automatic lifejacket or manual inflate lifejacket, both with sprayhood, light and whistle, is appropriate to the boating activity you are undertaking. Ideally you should fit or buy a lifejacket that is fitted with crotch straps; these will stop the lifejacket riding up over your head. You should also consider a lifejacket that is fitted with dye-markers and personal locator beacon to aid location and harness D ring for harness attachment to stop you falling off in the first place.

Lifejackets are suitable when on an open boat (e.g. powerboat or RIB), when going ashore in a yacht tender, on a sailing yacht or motor cruiser and generally where you do not expect to enter the water.

Lifejackets come in different styles and sizes and some will work better for different body styles than others. Where possible test your lifejacket in a controlled environment to check that it will work for you.

Levels of buoyancy

In addition to selecting between a lifejacket and a buoyancy aid, consideration also needs to be given to the level of buoyancy that is required.

Buoyancy aids and lifejackets have different levels of buoyancy. These levels of buoyancy should be considered and influence your choice. There are four main buoyancy levels: 50, 100, 150 and 275.

In general terms, Level 50 is a buoyancy aid designed for when help is close at hand, whereas Level 150 is a general purpose lifejacket used for offshore cruising and motor boating.

Specialist lifejackets are available for infants and children.

Remember that inflatable lifejackets and buoyancy aids are useless unless they work. They must be checked regularly and serviced in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

First aid kits

On all but the smallest boats, it is good practice to have two first aid kits on board. One for day to day use for regular requirements such as plasters from which your crew can help themselves, and a second which is reserved for incidents, so you do not find that something critical is missing at the most inopportune of moments.

Stowage and maintenance

The first aid kit should be stored in a damp proof strong canvas bag, or box which is clearly labelled. Your first aid kit should not be forgotten in your maintenance routine, as medicines will go out of date. Check the contents and dates regularly and retain the instructions for all items.

Inshore

A very basic first aid kit will be needed for inshore boating. Sun cream and medication relative to the crew needs e.g. sea sickness tablets, headache tablets, asthma treatment plus items to deal with minor incidents - plasters, wound dressings, triangular bandages, gloves, and a thermal protective aid.

Coastal

Equipment: Gloves, thermal protective aid, triangular bandages, supporting (crepe) bandage, tough cut shears (for cutting clothing), tweezers, resuscitation pocket mask

Medications: Sun cream, sea sickness tablets, paracetamol, ibuprofen, aspirin, antihistamine cream / tablets, indigestion tablets, Imodium (or alternative diarrhoea remedy), re-hydration salts, and medication relative to the crew needs e.g. asthma treatment

Wounds: Plasters, wound dressings, antiseptic wipes, cling film, eye dressing

First aid best practice and advice is continually changing and evolving. Taking up to date advice and tailoring the first aid kit to the individuals are both essential elements of voyage preparation.

Wear your kill cord

If you are on an open powerboat or RIB make sure you wear the KILL CORD. If your boat is not fitted with one then get one fitted. The kill cord should be attached around your leg. Always check your kill cord works before you go out on the water.

Carbon Monoxide

Often dubbed the ‘Silent Killer’, Carbon Monoxide can kill quickly if inhaled in high concentrations. Check your on-board appliances are safe. If you don’t have a CO alarm, install one and test it regularly.

Fire

If a fire does occur, it is imperative that you have sufficient firefighting equipment to hand and that you know how to use it, if the fire is to be extinguished quickly and effectively.

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Lights, Shapes and Sound Signals

Lights and shapes are used to indicate the status of a vessel at sea and the direction in which a vessel underway is moving, to allow the correct action to be taken by all the vessels when in sight of each other.

The International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREGs) not only prescribe the actions of each vessel in all states of visibility, they also stipulate the lights that should be fitted to a vessel, the shapes that should be available and the sound signals and signalling equipment necessary, to allow a vessel to make its status clear at all times.

Lights and shapes: The rules concerning lights must be complied with from sunset to sunrise and at all other times in restricted visibility. Shapes are used during daylight hours to indicate a vessel's status and to avoid doubt or confusion. The prime example is the requirement for a yacht that is motor sailing to display a motoring cone (a conical shape apex downwards) in the forepart of the vessel.

The rules also stipulate the exact colour of the lights, their intensity, the minimum distance each light must be visible for, and their position on the vessel.

Going sailing? Have a plan

Think 'what if'? Have a plan and ensure that your boat is adequately prepared.

Be prepared

Be prepared; think 'what if?' Don't ruin a good day out on the water with insufficient planning.

The extent of your plan will differ depending on the type of boat you have and the type of trip to want to take. A day in an estuary will need less planning than an offshore channel crossing for example.

Essential elements to your plan

Passage plan: This needn't be complicated but an element of planning is required for even the simplest, and shortest of journeys. The plan will include elements including; your route, any hazards or navigational risks that need to be avoided and constraints that may limit your options. Passage planning is in fact an obligation for all seafarers by international agreement; SOLAS V.

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Remember to plan for the unexpected: just in case weather conditions deteriorate or you suffer an injury look at the charts and pilot book before you leave and consider places where you could take refuge if necessary. Could delays lead to night time sailing?

Navigation dangers: check with an up-to-date chart and current pilot book or almanac for any navigational dangers such as shoals, overfalls and buoyage.

Weather: before you go check the weather forecast and get regular updates if you are planning to be out for any length of time.

Tides: check the tidal predictions for your trip and ensure that they fit with what you are planning to do.

Limitations of the boat: consider whether your boat is up to the proposed trip and that you have the appropriate safety equipment and stores with you.

Engine: checking your engine before you set off could avoid breaking down when you are underway.

Crew: take into account the experience and physical ability of your crew. Are they up to the trip you are planning? Are they kitted out with the right personal safety equipment?

Don't forget

Don't forget to share your plan: with someone onshore who knows what to do should they become concerned about your well-being.