



Aquatic Consulting Services

1220 Rosecrans Street #915 • San Diego • California • 92106

Boating Tip #33: Man Overboard (MOB)

Prevent a MOB situation from occurring in the first place by remembering “one hand for the boat, and one hand for yourself.” Wear non-skid shoes while sailing. In rough weather, or when sailing at night, wear a safety harness and tether yourself to a jackline or other secure point as you move about topside. Make sure your lifelines are secure and well maintained. Implement a policy that no one leaves the cockpit to move forward on the deck unless a second crew member is alerted to the fact and is watching from the cockpit.

Be prepared and know what to do when someone falls overboard. Have a written, rehearsed emergency action plan. Routinely practice your MOB recovery drills. Knowing what to do in an emergency may be the difference between a successful recovery, and tragedy. Most importantly, don't panic.

When someone falls overboard act quickly to keep the boat close and avoid losing sight of the victim:

- Yell MOB and alert crew to the MOB situation. Get all hands on deck.
- Throw buoyant objects in the water and get buoyancy to the victim. Throw any floatable objects into water – litter the sea to make it easier to relocate the spot where the victim went overboard. Throw the Lifesling® in the water and trail it behind the boat. Or, release the pins or keepers and throw the horseshoe buoy / ring buoy and floating strobe light, and the MOB pole in the water (in that order). Or, activate the man overboard module (MOM).
- Do not lose sight of the victim. Assign a spotter, with no other duties to perform, to keep the victim in sight and point at the victim in the water.
- Press the MOB button on the GPS or chart plotter. Latitude and longitude will be recorded and the receiver will automatically display a course back to the MOB location.
- Use the VHF radio and issue a Pan – Pan radio call on channel 16 to alert the USCG and other boats in the vicinity that you have an emergency situation in progress.
- If you are flying a spinnaker, head into the wind, let the spinnaker halyard run free, douse the spinnaker, sheet in the main and beat back to the MOB, or turn on the engine and motor back to the MOB.
- If you are using a whisker pole, release the genoa sheet and beat back to the MOB, or turn on the engine and motor back to the MOB.

- Maneuver the boat back to the victim using the MOB recovery method most appropriate for the situation.

MOB Recovery Methods:

Quick-stop recovery

- Bring the boat into the wind and trim the mainsail to close hauled.
- Turn through the wind without releasing or easing the headsail.
- Continue turning until the wind is almost astern.
- When the victim is abaft of the beam, furl the headsail.
- Jibe the boat.
- Turn up directly into the wind and steer toward the victim, loosen sheets, back or furl sails to slow to a stop for rescue.

Quick-turn (figure-8) recovery

- Head onto a beam reach and sail 4 - 7 boat lengths away from the MOB (shorter distance in rough seas).
- Come about onto a beam then broad reach, and sail until parallel and downwind of the MOB.
- Turn up directly into the wind and steer toward the victim, loosen sheets, back or furl sails to slow to a stop for rescue.

Lifesling® recovery

- Head into the wind, let the sails luff, and stop the boat
- Deploy the Lifesling® by opening the case, throwing the flotation collar over the transom, and let the floating, yellow polypropylene line trail out behind the boat.
- While still headed into the wind, trim the mainsail to close hauled. Tack and continue turning without easing the headsail. Allow the headsail to backwind. Jibe. Continue to sail or motor in a wide circle while trailing the Lifesling® as if you were trying to pick up a waterskier. Don't run over the Lifesling® or the trailing line. The circular motion of the boat will cause the Lifesling® and line to be drawn inward toward the victim.
- The victim grabs the line, puts the Lifesling® over his/her head and under his/her arms. Clip the buckles (next to the D rings or towing loops) together.
- Bring the boat into the wind, and furl or drop sails to stop the boat immediately. Turn off the motor. Do not tow the victim while he/she is secured in the Lifesling®.

Under power recovery

- Before turning on the engine and using auxiliary power to get back to the MOB, check for lines trailing in the water that could foul the prop.

- Shift into neutral and start the engine.
- Shift into forward gear, and motor toward the victim.
- Head into the wind and approach the victim at a very slow speed.
- Stop the boat alongside the victim. Turn up directly into the wind, loosen sheets, luff or furl sails to slow to a stop for rescue.
- Make contact with and secure the victim. Once contact is made with the victim and he/she is being pulled toward the boat, turn off the engine and drift (to avoid prop injuries or carbon monoxide poisoning).
- Get the victim back on board. Avoid getting into the water yourself. Lower the boat ladder. If the victim is not injured, help him/her climb back on board using the ladder or transom boarding platform.
- A MOB victim may not be able to assist in his/her recovery because of unconsciousness, exhaustion, hypothermia or injury. If the victim cannot climb back aboard unassisted, bring the MOB on board using brute force, a Lifesling® and hoisting gear, mainsail dipped into the water, or dinghy transfer.

Hoisting gear:

Lifesling® used with halyard, block and tackle, fairlead and winch

- Pull the MOB alongside, preferably on the windward side of the boat, so the boat does not run over the victim. Have the victim face the boat and rest on his back. Pull the victim up high onto the side of the boat. Tie the Lifesling® retrieval line to a cleat.
- Attach the carabiner or snap shackle on the end of the block and tackle to the stainless steel D rings or the loop in the Lifesling® retrieval line. Make sure the block and tackle are connected to the Lifesling® outside of the sailboat's lifelines.
- Attach the other end of the block and tackle to the main halyard and raise the block at least ten feet above the deck, to clear the lifelines and give yourself a mechanical advantage in lifting the MOB on board. Secure the halyard. Run the tail of the tackle (fall line) down from the block, through a fairlead and to a winch (or the anchor windlass). Winch the MOB on board.

Lifesling® used with halyard, and Swiss Tech Mastlift®

- Pull the MOB alongside, preferably on the windward side of the boat, so the boat does not run over the victim. Have the victim face the boat and rest on his back. Pull the victim up high onto the side of the boat. Tie the Lifesling® retrieval line to a cleat.
- Push the black knob to disengage the brake while at the same time pulling out about 15 feet of the load-bearing lift line. Release the knob and pull on the load-bearing lift line to re-engage the brake. Attach the halyard to the Mastlift® top ring bolt. Raise the Mastlift® at least ten feet above the deck, to clear the lifelines. Attach the thimble at the end of the load bearing line to the loop in the Lifesling® retrieval line. Pull down on the endless line to lift the MOB on board.

If you fall overboard, make sure someone aboard knows you are no longer on the boat. Make noise, yell, blow your whistle, wave your arms and call attention to yourself. Activate your strobe light or laser flare. In daylight, use your signal mirror. If you are carrying a personal locator beacon, turn it on. If you are carrying a portable VHF radio, make a Mayday call, and attempt to contact your boat.

Conserve energy and heat. Survival float and make only slow easy movements. In cold water, try to keep your head out of the water and get in to a heat escape lessening position by tucking in your legs and bringing your arms in close to your body and across your chest. Keep your clothes on and use them to help you stay afloat by trapping air in the wet clothing.

If you see a MOB pole or strobe light, swim towards it and find the attached ring buoy or horseshoe buoy and use it to help you stay afloat. If a Lifesling® reaches you, grab the line, and put the Lifesling® over your head and under your arms. If a heaving line is thrown toward you, grab the line and tie it around your upper body using a bowline.

As the rescue boat approaches you, make sure you can be seen so you are not run over. Make sure the engine has been turned off before you attempt to board the boat. Be careful if trying to board from the stern ladder – a pitching boat in large seas can be hazardous. If you are injured or disabled, ask for help and assist with your recovery in anyway you can without causing further inuring to yourself.