



Aquatic Consulting Services

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Boating Tip #63: Suddenly In Charge

What if it's the captain that falls overboard, is injured, incapacitated or dies? Would the crew know what to do, how to call for assistance, or how to get back to safety? Have you designated someone to be second in command and to take over for you if you can't continue to run the vessel? If you are sailing shorthanded, can your partner and only crew member handle the boat alone? Before heading offshore, make sure all crew members know how to react in an emergency, how to obtain help, how to prevent a bad situation from getting worse, and have actually participated in emergency safety drills.

Crew Member Minimum Knowledge and Skills:

- _____ Can they depower the sails and stop the boat? Do they know how to heave to?
- _____ Can they lower or furl the sails?
- _____ Can they turn on / turn off the engine?
- _____ Can they drop / retrieve the anchor?
- _____ Do they know how to use the VHF radio to make a mayday call?
- _____ Do they know how to activate the DSC to send a distress message, or activate the emergency button on a Garmin Communicator or Spot Messenger?
- _____ Do they know how to contact Vessel Assist, Sea Tow, TowBoat US, or other private membership towing company in order to obtain assistance?
- _____ Do they know how to use the satellite phone to make a call for help?
- _____ Do they know how to activate the EPIRB or a PLB?
- _____ Do they know where the horn is and how to use sound signals to communicate danger or doubt (5 short, rapid blasts)?

- _____ Do they know where all the fire extinguishers are located? Can they put out a small fire using the fire extinguishers and fire blankets?
- _____ Do they know how to deploy the Lifesling, MOB pole, ring buoy or horseshoe buoy, MOM, strobe light? Do they know how to get back to and retrieve someone who has fallen overboard, and get them back onboard the boat?
- _____ Do they know how to activate the MOB function on the chartplotter to create a waypoint so they can locate the spot where someone went overboard?
- _____ Do they know where the flares, flare guns, orange smoke and other distress signals are located? Do they know how to use them without injuring themselves or catching the boat on fire?
- _____ Do they know how to turn on the running, steaming or anchor lights at night so they can be seen by other vessels?
- _____ Do they know how to determine where they are? Can they use latitude and longitude obtained from a GPS to find their position and plot a course on a chart? Can they steer a compass course? Do they know how to use a chartplotter to find their way to a safe harbor?
- _____ Do they know how to engage the autopilot and set / adjust a course? Do they know how to turn the autopilot off when they need to hand steer?
- _____ If all else fails, do they know when and how to deploy the liferaft? Do they know where the ditch bag is located?