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The Five Things to tell your boat guests

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'Apart from keeping their fingers out of the winches, what do you tell them?' . [Click Here to view large photo](#)

Having guests on your boat? Especially non-yachtie guests? How do you prevent them from harming themselves and keep all safe? In the USA it's National Safety Week coming up (May 16-22) and Tom Lochhaas here gives his handy check-list of five safety guidelines you should explain to your guests or new crew briefly, BEFORE you leave the dock or mooring.

When the weather is good and conditions are stable, a skipper is often tempted to get underway immediately—and tell guests or crew about safety equipment and actions 'later on'. The problem is that if a need arises, it's usually too late then to talk about safety actions, because immediate action is needed.

Remember too that you the captain may be involved in an emergency and unavailable to give instructions at the time. Imagine if you were knocked overboard — would your guests know how to rescue you or call for help?

Here are five safety guidelines to show and tell guests and crew BEFORE heading out.

1. Make sure everyone has a life jacket.

Don't just tell them where life jackets are stored, but get them out and make sure everyone has one. Have them try them on and make any adjustments needed for a good fit. Then each guest can put the life jacket where they can find it later (better yet: wear it). Children under age 12 should wear one at all times.

Also show them your throwable life ring or seat

cushion and instruct them that if anyone goes overboard, even when wearing a life jacket, throw the life ring or additional life jackets toward the person in the water. They will provide additional buoyancy for the person, and having several items in the water makes it easier to find the area if you're under sail and it takes a minute or two to return.

2. Show everyone how to stop the boat.

Assume, in the worst case scenario, that you are in the water or having a medical or other emergency. Sailing crew can likely stop the boat or return to you, but guests may not know what to do. Under sail, show them at least how to release the mainsheet and jib sheet immediately to spill the wind and stop the boat.

Under power, show them how to shut down the engine—it's not good enough to think you have the boat in neutral if a person may come anywhere near the prop. Once you're underway, you can talk more about how to run the boat back to a person overboard under either sail or power—but before starting out, guests should at least know how to stop the boat.



It's best if they all have a life jacket on - ...

3. Show everyone where fire extinguishers are located.

If a fire were to break out, you might be too busy doing other things to fetch a fire extinguisher. Show people where they are and how to release them from a mounting bracket.

4. Show the boat's radio and how to use it.

Several kinds of emergencies might result in you being incapacitated and needing help. In this day of universal cell phones, guests may assume they can simply call the applicable emergency number. Off the coast they may lack a signal, and even if they have a signal, using a VHF radio is better. The Coast Guard will hear a radio distress call virtually anywhere in coastal waters, and other boaters nearby monitoring channel 16 may also hear and arrive to give help long before the Coast Guard does. With a phone call, these boaters obviously will not know you are in distress.

Unless you are very near land where crew and guests can easily identify shore features to describe the boat's position in a distress call, you should have your GPS unit on. Make sure at least one guest knows how to read longitude and latitude to be able to give your location in an emergency call.

5. Explain the plan if someone falls overboard.

Falling overboard is the most common boating emergency, a situation that requires immediate action from others in addition to the captain. Tell them what to do if you yourself end up in the water. (If your guests are not sailors or boaters, the best they may be able to do is stop the boat so that you can swim to it.) But explain that you need their help if one of them falls overboard. As noted earlier, throw the life ring and other floating objects immediately. Assign one person to watch the person in the water at all times, pointing with an outstretched arm. Others should stand by for your orders, such as controlling the sails or preparing a retrieval system such as a LifeSling. It takes a coordinated team effort to return the boat to someone in the water and assist the person back on board.

Then head out and have fun!

Your safety 'show and tell' doesn't have to be scary—that's not the point. It takes only a few minutes to cover these basics, but should an emergency occur, this will have been time very well spent.



Now you can relax and have fun - ...

by Tom Lochhaas, About.com/Sail-World



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