

# FIRST BOAT

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## **Don't Panic, Just Go Find The Life Jackets!**

*In this week's column, Vin Pica shares some safety ideas that every boater should embrace, including a "pre flight" checklist for boaters...*

Guest blog by [Vincent Pica](#)



Where else would you wear a life jacket? Photo courtesy United States Coast Guard.

A number of years ago, as I was doing a (free) vessel exam for the owner of a very substantial yacht, I got to the part where I ask to see the life jackets. He pointed me to a locker, which I opened to find the life jackets, stowed under an anchor, chain and additional rode. This column is about that...

### **No Good If You Can't Get To Them**

I promptly asked him, "sir, do you have any grandchildren?" "Why, yes, I do. 5 of them. Why do you ask?" I replied, "Imagine what forces you will be under when you say these words to your grandchildren, 'quick! Put on a life jacket!' and you point to this locker. Which one of your grandchildren will be able to move this anchor to get to the life jackets – which are still in their wrappers, btw." He blanched.

No safety equipment is of any use if you can't get to it. Or, no one knows where it is except you, the skipper, who is likely to be mighty busy just when safety equipment is needed. Talk about pressure!

### **Pre-Underway Check List**

By USCG regulations, before we leave the dock on a mission – of any type or any duration – we must, as a crew, go through a check-list akin to a vessel exam. This includes, among many items, where are:

1. The extra life jackets (we must have ours on at all times, which is an EXCELLENT idea, skipper) [Do I REALLY Need to Wear a Life Jacket](#);
2. The medical kit – and ensure that none of the perishable supplies have in fact perished due to the passage of time;
3. The “visual distress signals”, i.e., flares – and that they have not expired and are serviceable ([Visual Distress Signals and the Private Boat Captain](#));
4. The boat hook – a good tool for extending for retrieving something – or someone – that may be just out of reach;
5. The Man Overboard “apparatus”, i.e., line and ring to throw to someone who has indeed [fallen overboard](#);
6. And fire extinguishers ([My Boat Is On Fire](#)).

This list is by no means exhaustive but it represents some of the major categories of pending disaster that may befall a skipper. While you are dealing with the boat and how it needs to be used to respond to the emergency, your crew can be dealing with the crew's response. Whether it be a grounding (more about [boats running aground](#)), or far worse, a vessel sinking being dealt with ([more about boats sinking](#)), you as the skipper have a lot on your mind and a lot to deal with. Can you imagine yourself also having to stop dealing with the emergency at hand so that you can direct crew to emergency equipment that will protect them and you from the effects of that emergency?

### **But Everyone Has a Pressure Point...**

Beyond which, they start to crack. What do you do if the crew can't handle the pressure as well as you are handling it?

Well, how about handing them the laminated lay-out of your boat with the location of all the equipment labeled? Seriously, of all the risks that you spend time and money in preparing for and against, have you thought about panic as a risk? What then?

“Honey, hey, enough! Here, look at this – right now – and go get everybody in life jackets. Now!”

It is likely to reduce the panic because now the crew has something to focus on other than the water sloshing on the floor boards...

Oh, remember the comment about a (free) vessel exam at the start of this column? If you want one, email me below or see [Get a Free Safety Check](#).

BTW, if you are interested in being part of USCG Forces, email me at [JoinUSCGAux@aol.com](mailto:JoinUSCGAux@aol.com) or go direct to the D1SR Human Resources department, who are in charge of new members matters, at [DSO-HR](#) and we will help you “get in this thing...”