

FIRST BOAT

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Tuesday, January 08, 2013

[Vin Pica - Safety on the Ice](#)

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Editor's Note: *Congratulations to Vin Pica for achieving the post of COMMODORE in the USCG AUXILIARY. We're proud of his contributions to keeping our shores and waters safe here in the Northeast with his outstanding USCG Aux service, and around the country with his prolific boating safety articles.*

Safety on the Ice – Barely and Very Carefully

Here's how the story goes. In the dead of winter, two duck hunters and their trusty hunting dog drive their brand new Range Rover out on to the ice of Lake St. Clair, and, seeing that there were no open leads to entice migratory birds to land, take out a stick of dynamite, light it and throw it as far out on the ice as they can. The plan is simple. The dynamite blows a substantial hole in the ice; they get back in the car and run the heater until the migratory birds arrive. They step out with their shotguns full of bird shot and bag much of the flock. *(continues after the photo)*



Photo: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

So, as the dynamite stick is flying through the air, the dog takes off after it, thinking that a game of fetch is exactly what will make his day. Grabbing the lit stick of dynamite in his mouth, he turns and starts running back to his master and fellow hunter. This of course alarms the hunters no end. Seeing that waving their arms wildly and shouting, “no! no! no!” isn’t working, they fire their bird shot at the charging dog – striking fear into a bewildered Fido. Fido turns to his only source of cover – the car. Running under the car to hide, all is fine until he burns his rump on the still-hot exhaust pipe. As he yelps and takes off running again, the dynamite stick, which was left behind with the yelp, explodes. This sends the brand new Range Rover, in many pieces, to the bottom of Lake St. Clair.

Funny – but only apocryphal as every Coast Guard station north of the 40th degree of latitude was telling that story a couple of winters ago, swearing that one of the locals swore to them that they knew somebody that was related to somebody who knew the dog owner.

But some of us do fish and/or hunt on the frozen lakes, creeks and bays when we can’t boat. Please heed the following from the US Coast Guard:

Ice is unpredictable and dangerous. While the Coast Guard understands winter recreation on the ice is a tradition in many places of the country, it is important to take safety measures:

- Always check the weather and ice conditions before any trip out onto the ice. Ice thickness is not consistent, even over the same body of water.
- Always tell family and friends where you are going and when you are expected to be back, and stick to the plan.
- Use the buddy system. NEVER go out onto the ice alone.
- Dress in bright colors. Wear an exposure suit, preferably one that is waterproof, and a personal floatation device.
- Carry a whistle or noise-making device to alert people that you are in distress; carry a cell phone and/or a VHF-FM radio in order to contact the nearest Coast Guard station in the event you see someone in distress.
- Carry two screwdrivers or a set of ice awls. If you fall through the ice you can use these items to help get yourself out. They are more effective than using your hands.

Remember, hypothermia is a killer and it sneaks up on you with woolen slippers (see [Spring Warning - Cold Water Boating](#)) Cold water safety presentations by the Auxiliary are available to local organizations and can be arranged by contacting the Coast Guard Auxiliary District Public Affairs Officer via their Web site.

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