

THE *East Hampton • Southampton • Riverhead • Southold • Shelter Island*
INDEPENDENT

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Lightning

What To Do

Well, not getting hit in the first place is the best advice. If the weather forecast is bad, forget about trying to get out there to take advantage of the predators starting to "feed up" (they can sense the lowering pressure via their lateral lines) before the storm. It isn't worth it.

But, if you are out there, what do you do when you see a storm approaching?

NOAA says:

- Get out of the water if you are swimming off the transom. It's a great conductor of electricity.
- If caught in a boat, crouch down in the center away from metal hardware.
- Don't stand in puddles of water (ya think?).

Let me add a couple of thoughts:

- Life jackets on everyone.
- Disconnect all electronics that aren't essential to getting home.
- Electrical tape over the exposed leads so nothing climbs up the wire to the gear.

Seeing The Storm

If you can see the edges of the storm, and the center of the storm is between you and home, run at speed at a 90-degree angle to the storm and try to go around it. Squalls can be as deadly as a major blow but they are smallish and can be avoided.

If the storm covers the sky from horizon to horizon, say a prayer (I carry one on the outside of my sea journal) and head in at speed. (See The Independent article, "Skippering in Heavy Seas", July 15, 2010.)

Get on the radio and let someone know where you are, where you are headed and at what speed

you can make. Check in every 15 minutes. After 30 minutes of not checking in, someone needs to start the "rescue starts now" clock.

It would be great to have individuals aboard who are competent in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid. Many individuals struck by lightning or exposed to excessive electrical current can be saved with prompt and proper artificial respiration and/or CPR. There is no danger in touching persons after they have been struck by lightning. No joke. Some people fear that.

No one has CPR training? Call the American Red Cross and get a course under your keel.

Struck!

If a boat has been, or is suspected of having been, struck by lightning (overnight on a mooring?), check out the electrical system and the compasses to insure that no damage has occurred. A number of years ago, I dinghy'd out to my son's 17-foot Seahunt, sitting on her mooring east of Gunning Point. As I approached, I noticed that the bow-mounted navigation lights were broken.

"Son of a gun, some yahoo hit the boat last night. Must have been drunk as a skunk!" Then I noticed some of the other electronics had scorch marks and cracked glass covers. The light went on! I realized that this must be a leftover from a storm that had come through the night before.

Scratching my head, I lifted the cover to check the fuel tank. Looking down, I saw that the sender wire that runs from the cockpit gauge back to the fuel tank was completely scorched – to within one inch of the fuel tank itself. We re-wired the boat and repeated our prayer: Dear God, Thy sea is so great and my boat is so small. Protect me . . .

BTW, if you are interested in being part of USCG Forces, email me at 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...”