



Technology Overload & The Private Boater - Talking Cell Phones

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You've seen many articles and columns here about technology aboard*. And as functionality of cell phones starts to rival computers (did I say "rival" - I should have said "outpaces!"), we are right at the cusp of technology overload. This can't be good for safety of life at sea. This column is about that.

US Coast Guard Advisory

On October 29, 2010, Rear Admiral Paul Zukunft, Assistant Commandant for Marine Safety, Security, and Stewardship issued an maritime advisory on the use of cell phones aboard. In part, Marine Safety Advisory 01-10 said, "The potential risk associated with improper use of cellular telephones and other devices in the marine environment while navigating or performing other vessel functions should be apparent to vessel owners and operators. Consequently, the Coast Guard strongly recommends vessel owners and operators to develop and implement effective operational policies outlining when the use of cellular telephones and other devices is appropriate or prohibited."

This is true across all jurisdictions, land, sea and air. And cell phones can certainly be game-changers (good and bad) for the mariner (see SSP, "Can You Hear Me Now - Cell Phones and Boats", 2/10/10.) This situation has created a new class of problem: Distracted Operations.

Information Overload vs Expanded Awareness

Even in my own operational facility, CGAUX 251384, I have 2 "desk mounted" radios (USCG requirement for an operational facility), and a spare handheld radio for mobile operations. All three are mounted overhead. In the "dashboard", there is a multi-function screen through which is filtered real time GPS information, AIS, radar (overlaid on top of each other in a layered, color-coded fashion) and a



forward-looking-infra-red camera in an adjacent window. I will admit this is right at the edge of my "comprehensibility." If a crewman is asking questions, or more importantly passing information, while something critical is being presented either over the radio or on the screen, it is imperative to have the ability to parse information and/or the authority to delegate - and quickly. Now, with that said, the resultant river of data can, in the right hands, provide a heightened "situational awareness" that adds up to a safer vessel. This is in fact why I installed the gear. But the US Coast Guard's Marine Safety Advisory 01-10 is a wake-up call to call mariners, this one included.

Head's Up

Let's think this through a bit. First, technology is not a panacea nor a substitute for seamanship skills. Technology is there to make what was time-consuming (e.g., GPS charting versus pencil-and-parallel-rulers) easier and/or faster or to provide a quantum leap beyond human capabilities (e.g., radar.) But all these tools are not worth their weight as ballast if the skipper doesn't know what basic seamanship skills to employ with them.

Secondly, you have to get - and keep - your priorities straight. When the cell phone rings, why answer it while underway? There is voice-mail, you know. And, it would be a simple procedure to implement within the household that if there was something urgent, call twice - if the same tel# comes up twice, you know to answer it now. And give someone the helm while you do.

Thirdly, when was the last time you took a boating safety class? There are plenty of good ones out there that can be taken right up to the level of an experienced skipper. No one knows what they don't know - and the advanced classes are full of fellow skippers. Not everything worth learning is in the manuals. Passing time while accumulating the latest scuttlebutt is an ancient, honored and useful maritime tradition... From long before there was anything remotely called a cell phone...

* some prior articles on technology aboard:

- 08/01/07 Sounding Smart on the Radio
- 03/24/10 Rescue 21 - Search & Rescue in the 21st Century
- 11/29/06 EPIRBs, PPIRBs and GPIRBs - What!?
- 12/19/07 Radar - Your "Eye Ayes!
- 09/10/08 High Def Radar Has Arrived and All Has Changed
- 01/02/08 GPS - How Does it Work?
- 06/09/10 AIS - Say What?

BTW, if you are interested in being part of USCG Forces, email me at JoinUSCGAux2010@aol.com or go direct to John Blevins, who is in charge of new members matters, at FSO-PS@emcg.us and we will help you "get in this thing..."



FISHING WITH TONY

EPA DENIES PETITION SEEKING BAN ON LEAD FISHING TACKLE

by TONY SALERNO

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has denied a petition calling for a ban on the manufacture, use and processing of lead in fishing gear.

In a letter to the petitioners, EPA indicated that the petitioners have not demonstrated that the requested rule is necessary to protect against an unreasonable risk of injury to health or the environment, as required by the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA). The letter further indicates that the increasing number of limitations on the use of lead fishing gear on some federal and state lands, as well as various education and outreach activities, call into question whether a national ban on lead in fishing gear would be the least burdensome, adequately protective approach to address the concern, as called for under TSCA. EPA's letter also notes that the prevalence of non-lead alternatives in the marketplace continues to increase.

"We're happy that EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson and her staff have denied this lead ban petition, there was really no justification for it to begin with," said Jim Donofrio, Executive Director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA). "If this petition had moved forward, it could've had a devastating impact on our coastal fishing industry."

In September, RFA issued a press release calling on members to send letters to EPA Administrator Jackson asking that the lead ban petition be denied. According to Donofrio, while there may be legitimate concerns raised by the issue of lost lead based terminal gear used by anglers; other more reasonable approaches to minimize the introduction of lead into the marine environment should be investigated. "Calling for a sudden and complete ban on lead fishing products seems to run well beyond the intent of the original petition," Donofrio said in September.

"RFA was happy to weigh in on behalf of the tackle industry, and we're very pleased that RFA members jumped up and wrote letters to the EPA on this important issue," Donofrio said today following the EPA's announcement. "When the recreational anglers get active and engaged, they can beat back this frivolous anti-fishing movement, and this is clear proof." Donofrio said such a ban would've all but eliminated the opportunity for individual anglers to make their own bucktails, sinkers and jigs at home, and would've also meant that fishermen would've had to replace much of their current tackle collections.



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