

Seamanship

Quick Honey, Put on a Life Jacket!

by Vincent Pica, District Commodore, First District, Southern Region (DISR), U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary

A number of years ago I was doing a (free) vessel exam for the owner of a very substantial yacht and 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. Five 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?" 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, the location of:

- The extra life jackets. (We must have ours on at all

times, which is an EXCELLENT idea, skipper.)

- The medical kit – and ensure that none of the perishable supplies have in fact perished due to the passage of time.
- The "visual distress signals", i.e., flares – and that they have not expired and are serviceable.
- The boat hook – a good tool for extending to retrieve – or someone – just out of reach.
- The Man Overboard "apparatus", i.e., line and ring to throw to someone who has indeed fallen overboard.
- Fire extinguishers.

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, or far worse, a vessel sinking being dealt with, 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 a laminated layout of your boat with the location of all the equipment labeled? Seriously, of all the risks that you spend time and money 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. We'll square you away.

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."

