



Monday, November 15, 2010

[Six Tips to Surviving a Storm at Sea](#)

Our guest contributor from the USCG Auxiliary shares his experience to help you navigate through your next storm

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Facing 25 ft waves: USCG photo by Christopher Enoksen

The Nor'easter season is fully upon us so let's review some ideas on skippering in heavy weather.

1. **Put Your Life Jackets On** – Right away, the skipper has to direct everyone to don their life jackets. On my vessel, I have a heavy weather/type-1 life jacket on the back of my helm seat. Across the back, where the crew can read it, it says, "If you see the captain put this on, try to find one for yourself."
2. **Take Waves at an Angle** – Those waves that you are trying to muscle through pack tremendous power within them. So slow down and tack! Your 20 knots and 5 knots of wave speed multiply the force of the pounding. Slow down and divide the forces.
3. **Someone To Watch Over Me** – If things start to get dicey, get on the radio and call the USCG. Tell them where you are, where you are heading and why you are concerned about the situation. Most

likely, the watch stander will take that information and ask you to check in with him or her every 15 minutes.

4. **Any Port in a Storm** –Don't bet your life on a perceived deadline. Head to the nearest harbor you can safely make, even if that means turning away from home and putting the storm on your stern.

5. **Surf** – If you find the sea is going where you are, consider getting on the back of one of those growlers and staying there, all the way home. It takes considerable seamanship and helmsmanship to ride the back of a wave but consider this. If you have a following sea and one of those growlers catches up with you, he will swamp you from astern. Stay ahead and he can't...

6. **Create a Ditch Bag** – If things really get dicey, don't leave the boat until it sinks out from under you. But have a "ditch bag" ready – cell phone, handheld radio, fresh water, dry clothes, medical kit, flash light, flares, etc come immediately to mind.

I spent 5 days at sea in Hurricane Alberta nearly 30 years ago. I have a healthy respect for the sea and how fast things can go from bad to absolutely awful. Don't be a statistic. Be the skipper who can say, "I always bring my crew back."

You can learn more about Captain Pica and get more tips like this at his site, atlanticmaritimeacademy.com.

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A big "Thank You" to District Captain Vin Pica for contributing this life-saving advice... some of the tips may be obvious to you, but when taken as a whole these suggestions are priceless - especially if you have not yet been caught in a big storm.