



Quick, put on a life jacket!

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A number of years ago, as I was doing a vessel inspection for the owner of a very substantial yacht, I got to the part where I ask to see the life jackets.

The owner pointed me to a locker, which I opened to find the life jackets stowed under an anchor, chain and additional rode.

“Sir, do you have any grandchildren?” I asked the owner.

“Why, yes, I do,” he said. “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, by the way?”

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 Checklist

Under U.S. Coast Guard regulations, before we leave the dock on a mission — of any type or any duration — we must, as a crew, go through a checklist akin to a vessel exam. This includes, among many items, the location of:

1. The extra life jackets (we must have ours on at all times, which is an EXCELLENT idea, skipper)
2. The medical kit (we also ensure that none of the perishable supplies have perished due to the passage of time)
3. The “visual distress signals” (i.e., flares) and that they have not expired and are serviceable
4. The boat hook – a good tool for retrieving something or someone that may be just out of reach
5. The man overboard apparatus (i.e., line and life ring to throw to someone who has fallen overboard)
6. 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 an emergency, your crew can be dealing with its response.

Whether the emergency is a grounding, or far worse, a sinking vessel, you as the skipper will have a great deal on your mind and a lot to deal with. Can you imagine yourself also having to stop dealing with the emergency so 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, beyond all the risks that you spend time and money in preparing for and against, have you thought about panic as a risk?

In the event of an emergency, you can hand the laminated sheet to a crew member and instruct that person to get everyone in life jackets promptly (if they're not already wearing them – see above).

Not only does that help protect your crew, it's likely to reduce panic since they now have something to focus on other than the water sloshing on the floorboards ...

*This post is courtesy of **Capt. Vincent Pica**, chief of staff for the First District, Southern Region, United States Coast Guard Auxiliary.*

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...”