

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.

1. Life jackets on everyone.
2. Disconnect all electronics that aren't essential to getting home.
3. 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 prayer¹ (I carry one on the outside of my sea journal) and head in at speed. (See "[Heavy-Weather Skippering](#)")
4. 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.
5. It would be desirable 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's no danger in touching persons after they have been struck by lightning.
6. 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 ensure that no damage has occurred.

A number of years ago, I dinghy'd out to my son's 17' Seahunt, sitting on her mooring east of Gunning Point. As I approached, I noticed that the bow-mounted nav lights were broken. "Son of a gun, some yahoo hit the boat last night. Must have been drunk as a skunk!" Then I noticed that 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 rewired the boat and repeated our prayer.

1 "Dear God, Thy sea is so great and my boat is so small. Protect me..." [back to article](#)

About the Author: *Vincent Pica is a coxswain and the Commander of Flotilla 18-06 East Moriches. He was a navigator in a brown-water and blue-water sailboat racing crew for eight seasons. From the "iron sails" side, he is a licensed US Coast Guard Master of Steam and Diesel Powered Vessels, carries a Radar Observer endorsement, Unlimited, on his license and is certified in Marine Diesel Engine Operation and Maintenance.*

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