



From the Captain of the Port

Man Overboard!!!

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Editor's Note: Many of the MOB techniques described in this column are used with powerboats.

Last week, a friend of mine fell overboard – while boarding a boat at the dock! Sound crazy? Not really. The “victim” wasn’t wearing proper shoes when he stepped on the gunwales and not into the boat...and the wake of a passing boat (who shouldn’t have been making a wake!) rocked the vessel strongly. In other words, things just go wrong at the wrong time...Are you ready to deal with it?

As a case in point, when I take young boaters out for seamanship exercises, I start man overboard drills with an example. I bring the boat up to 20 knots and ask a youngster to throw a fender overboard – and then count to 10 before yelling “Man Overboard!” During those ten seconds, two things happen. The fender disappears behind the boat, well over a full football field behind, and the faces of the youngsters turn white.

Don't Fall Overboard!

Clearly, the best defense is not falling overboard. That means:

1. No “bow riding,” i.e. sitting on the bow with your feet dangling over the side (a violation of Federal regulations – no limbs outside the boat while underway). You could very likely be rendered unconscious by the boat passing over you...assuming the propeller misses you.

2. No sitting on the gunwales, even if you're holding on tight. If the skipper takes a wake too hard, you are airborne. If you land in the boat, it's a small miracle. If you were sitting on the transom, unless the boat is in reverse, physics demands that you end up in the water...if the boat is going fast enough for you to land behind the propeller. You could be unlucky enough to land on the prop. A variation of sitting on the gunwales is holding the taff rail (railing around the stern of the boat) and jumping up and down with the swells as the boat passes over them. This is swell fun until the boat gets sluiced to one side or the other by those same swells pushing the bow around. Instead of coming down inside the stern of the boat, which a moment ago was just below you, you come down in the water.

3. Failure to use the “3-point system” while working the boat can get even the most seasoned mariner. Always have three parts of your body in contact with the boat at all times, i.e. two hands, one foot, or two feet, one hand.

You Have Fallen Overboard!

You need to do two things. First, attract as much attention as possible as fast as you can. I never go on a boat without a knife, flashlight and whistle on my person. The light and whistle are to

attract attention. The knife is to cut away the line I am tangled in that's dragging me underwater. If the boat continues steaming away, start saving yourself – and that starts with conserving energy and heat. Eventually, someone will start to look for you. Don't panic and waste life-sustaining energy. Assume the HELP position, or at least float with your arms across your chest and your legs crossed. If you slip below the water, don't thrash and waste energy. Lie there for a few seconds and then dog paddle up. Get back in the prone position and start over. If the water isn't too cold, you can do this for hours.

Someone Has Fallen Off The Boat!

Train your crew in the following:

1. The first person that sees someone fall overboard does two things simultaneously. First, shouts at the top of his lungs, “MAN OVERBOARD!” and, second, NEVER takes his eyes off the person in the water and points at him constantly. I tell my crew, “Even if you have to watch him drown in front of you, never take your eyes off him.” Why? If you lose sight of him, we may never see him again. It's unbelievably difficult to find a head sticking out of the water. This is why the USCG often sends helicopters first to look for people in the water.

2. Someone else throws a cushion, fender, lifejacket – anything and everything – towards the victim to give them something to swim towards and hold onto.

3. The boat driver brings the boat to neutral. The skipper then determines what side the victim is on and turns the boat to the same side as the victim is on. This keeps the victim inside the turning radius of the boat while keeping the prop moving away from the person in the water.

4. Call the USCG and tell the watch stander you have a man overboard. Your crewmate may be injured, have swallowed a lungful of water or having a medical emergency (how about a heart attack?) Get the “rescue starts now” clock started ASAP!

5. Once alongside the victim, stop the engine entirely, especially if you're getting him back aboard via a swim platform.

Try the 10-second exercise with your crew. And watch their faces as the fender disappears astern...

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 FSO-PS@emcg.us and we will help you “get in this thing.” ♦

Captain Ed Cubanski is the Captain of the Port and Sector Commander for US Coast Guard Sector Long Island Sound. Captain Cubanski is responsible for all active-duty, reservist and auxiliary Coast Guard personnel within the Sector. Vin Pica, Commodore for the First District Southern Region in the US Coast Guard Auxiliary, works closely with Captain Cubanski and his staff to promote boating safety in the waters between Connecticut, Long Island and 200 nautical miles offshore. Sector Long Island Sound Command Center can be reached 24 hours a day at 203-468-4401.