

# FIRST BOAT

Vincent Pica  
Chief of Staff, First District, Southern Region (D1SR)  
United States Coast Guard Auxiliary

Tuesday, June 07, 2011

## [How Safe Can Your Boat Be?](#)

*Your boat is ready for the season, but is it really as safe as it can be? In today's column Vin Pica helps you make sure it is...*

Guest blog by [Vincent Pica](#)



Boat safety goes beyond the inspection sticker. Photo Courtesy U.S.C.G.

If you saw the movie “Marathon Man”, you will surely remember Sir Laurence Olivier holding a dentist’s drill over Dustin Hoffman’s tooth and asking, “Is eet safe? Is eet safe?” Poor Dustin Hoffman kept asking “safe about what??” – until he started screaming... Your boat may pass its vessel safety check – which means it at least meets Federal minimums... But is eet safe...? This column is about that...

### **Safe For What?**

Admiral Halsey is famous for many things but one is noting that, for a thousand years, safety starts at

the dock. What are you intending to do with this boat, on this passage, with a certain mission or task in mind – and it is properly outfitted for that. Certainly, meeting Federal minimums sounds more than a little short of the mark if you're intending to head out to the Hudson Canyons for an over-night fishing trip... OK, you've got your required number of flares for the size of your boat and a life jacket for everyone... but are you really prepared for what God's Great Ocean can throw at you..? What are the "optional" items that could open up the safety window for you while the USCG comes charging out to get you...?

### **Cell Phone v VHF Radio**

In my mind, the greatest piece of safety gear that you have on your boat is a simple VHF radio. Several Sunday's ago, the USCG saved six sailors off a sinking sailing vessel. The skipper pressed the "Digital Selective Calling" button on his radio (they all come with that button now) and, since he had connected it to his GPS, it sent his GPS coordinates directly to USCG rescue personnel. Station Shinnecock dispatched one of their vessels (USCG Auxiliarist Joe Tarlentino of Center Moriches was aboard and part of the rescue team) directly to the stricken vessel. The boat sank to the bottom but all six mariners were saved. What if they hadn't had a GPS hooked in to their DSC-equipped radio? Frankly, much the same result would have happened. Rescue-21 would have been able to generate a line of bearing to the boat and the USCG would have raced down that line until they came upon the vessel. What about a cell phone call? To who – your wife? "Honey, send help!" How about the fishing vessel that is a half-mile away – but you don't have his cell phone number... Maybe you can strap the cell phone to a rocket flare and try to hit him with it.

### **Getting Back Aboard**

If you do manage to lose a crewman overboard, or even yourself, how will you get back aboard? If you don't have a collapsible boarding ladder attached to your stern or your swim platform, you'll **never** get back aboard unless you can pull a "Flipper the Flying Porpoise" and jump into the boat. (See [When Someone Goes Overboard.](#)) Get a good one, with at least 3 steps that pull out so you can get your cold and cramped legs onto the bottom step. If you have to pull yourself up to steps that are just too high, you may find it impossible to save yourself...

### **Money No Object..?**

It always strikes me as penny-wise and pound-foolish to skimp on safety equipment – such as a GPS (see [Gee, GPS!](#)) or an EPIRB (see [EPIRB and You](#)) – but the reality is that not everyone is in a position to afford \$5/gallon gasoline and a \$500 GPS or \$900 EPIRB. Of course, we are talking about saving the life most important to you – yours!

BTW, if you are interested in being part of USCG Forces, email me at [JoinUSCGAux@aol.com](mailto: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..."