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

Coast Guard Aux NEWS ▸
October 05, 2011

Coast Guard Auxiliary News

By Vincent Pica
Chief of Staff, First District Southern Region, USCG Aux
US Coast Guard Licensed Master

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For information call Jim Mackin @ 631.324.2500

Quick, Honey, Put on a Life Jacket!

A number of years ago, as I was doing a (free) vessel exam for the owner of a very substantial yacht, I got to the part where I ask to see the life jackets. (see The Independent, "Life Jackets Save Lives – Maybe Yours", 2/11/09) He pointed me to a locker, which I opened to find the life jackets, stowed under an anchor, chain and additional rode. This column is about that.

No Good If You Can't Get To Them

I promptly asked him, "sir, do you have any grandchildren?" "Why, yes, I do. 5 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, btw." 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 Check List

By USCG regulations, before we leave the dock on a mission – of any type or any duration – we must, as a crew, go through a check-list akin to a vessel exam. This includes, among many items, where are:

1. The extra life jackets (we must have ours on at all times, which is an EXCELLENT idea, skipper (see The Independent, "Do I REALLY Need to Wear a Life Jacket", 9/24/08));

2. The medical kit – and ensure that none of the perishable supplies have in fact perished due to the passage of time;

3. The "visual distress signals", i.e., flares – and that they have not expired and are serviceable (see The Independent, "Visual Distress Signals and the Private Boat Captain", 9/27/06);

4. The boat hook – a good tool for extending for retrieving something – or someone – that may be just out of reach;

5. The Man Overboard "apparatus", i.e., line and ring to throw to someone who has indeed fallen overboard (see The Independent, "Maaaaaaann Overboard!", 11/19/08);

6. And fire extinguishers (see The Independent, "Vessel Afire!", 3/14/07).

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 the emergency, your crew can be dealing with the crew's response. Whether it be a grounding (see The Independent, "Hard Aground – Now What!?", 7/9/08), or far worse, a vessel sinking being dealt with (see The Independent, "We're Sinking", 12/13/06), you as the skipper have a lot on your mind and a lot to deal with. Can you imagine yourself also having to stop dealing with the emergency at hand so that 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 the laminated lay-out of your boat with the location of all the equipment labeled? Seriously, of all the risks that you spend time and money in preparing for and against, have you thought about panic as a risk? What then?

"Honey, hey, enough! Here, look at this – right now – and go get everybody in life jackets. Now!"

It is likely to reduce the panic because now the crew has something to focus on other than the water sloshing on the floor boards…

Oh, remember the comment about a (free) vessel exam at the start of this column? If you want one, email me below or see The Independent, "No Fuss, No Muss – and Your Favorite Price (free) – Vessel Exams", 4/8/08)

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…"