SEAgram

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Family Boating: Preparing for the Emergency

by Dolly Garza

Marine Advisory Program
University of Alaska
700 Katlian St. #D
Sitka, AK 99835-7314

Introduction

Family boating is an American tradition. Sport fishing, beach combing, hunting, and commercial fishing activities often include our children. Family boating is important in strengthening family ties; however, children should be prepared to handle a variety of emergencies. You must prepare for an emergency before you leave the dock. The next time you plan a family outing, think about what emergency could strike, and prepare your family to deal with it.

Safety Equipment

When preparing for an outing, either long or short, plan to take necessary survival equipment including:

- USCG approved personal flotation devices (PFDs) for everyone.
- Marine radio.
- Adequate fuel (⅓ to get there, ⅓ to get back, ⅓ to spare) premixed with outboard motor oil if necessary.
- Survival kit for each family member.
- USCG approved signals.
- First aid supplies (including needed medications).
- Extra warm clothes.
- Oars.
- Anchor attached to rope, attached to boat.
- Something to bail the boat with.
- Tools and parts for motor repair, including spark plugs.
- Water separator and fuel filter.
- A floating, throwable device (with a line attached) that you can throw to someone in the water.
- Camping gear.
- Extra emergency food.

Float Plan

Before leaving shore, let someone know:

- When you are leaving.
- Where you are going.
- Who is going with you.
- What route you are taking.
- When you plan to return.

They should know to call the Coast Guard or other search and rescue organization if you are a certain number of hours overdue.

Stability

Many boating casualties result from a lack of vessel stability.

- Balance your boat's load from front to back and from side to side. Tie the load down so that it cannot shift.
- Never exceed the weight recommendations on your boat's capacity plate. Carry less weight in bad weather or rough seas.
- Use the correct horsepower motor on your boat. Having too large a motor can make your boat less stable.
- All recent commercially built boats should have built-in flotation that enables them to float horizontally even when they are capsized. If you have built-in flotation, leave it there! If you don't have this flotation, attach buoyant items to your boat, such as buoys or styrofoam.

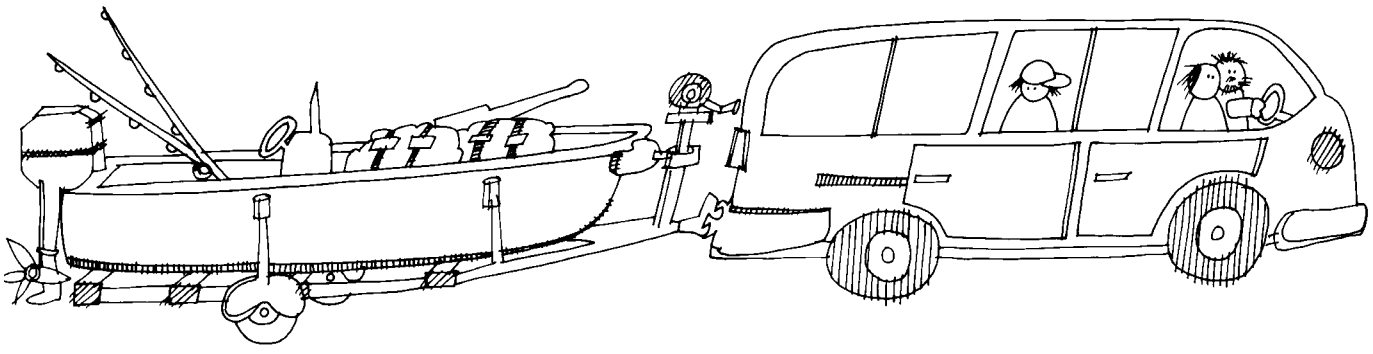
Boat Operations

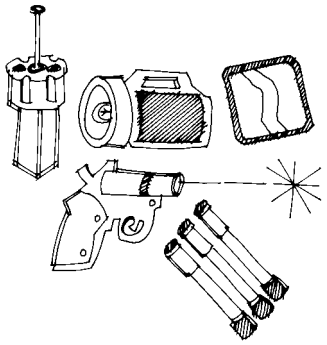
Does each family member know how to start the motor? How to kill it? How to slow down the boat? How to steer? Can they run the boat to a sheltered area or keep it from going onto the rocks? Each person should know the basics and be prepared to handle the boat if the operator is injured or lost.

Communication

Every boat, big or small, should have a marine radio. If rescuers don't know where you are, you and your family may die before they find you. Each family member should know how to use the radio and know how to call in a mayday which includes:

1. **Mayday Mayday Mayday.**
2. Name of family and boat, 3 times.
3. Location.
4. The nature of the accident and the action you are taking.
5. Description of boat.
6. Number of people on board.
7. Listen for a response. If you don't get one, repeat the message until you do.





Signals

Signals are required by the Coast Guard and are essential to rescue. Inspect your signals annually, and replace those that are outdated. Practice using signals—such as a pistol and flares, EPIRBs, or mirrors—with your family. Make sure each member is familiar with using them.

Cold Water

The water can be very cold, especially off-season. In Alaska the water temperature is typically 50°F or less, even during the summer. Body heat is lost 20 times faster in water than in air of the same temperature, so a person in the water loses vital heat quickly, and soon succumbs to hypothermia.

Hypothermia, which is a lowering of the body's core temperature, is characterized by slowed responses, dulled judgment, and loss of motor control. These symptoms quickly cause an inability to keep the head above the water, resulting in drowning. Most accidental boating deaths are caused directly by hypothermia, or by hypothermia-induced drowning.

Boating safety should include measures to prevent hypothermia from rain and spray while in the boat and from the effects of cold water in the event of capsizing, sinking, or a man overboard.

Man OverBoard

So what happens if you end up in the water and your 5-year-old daughter is in the boat? Does she know the best procedure for rescuing you? Can she slow down and stop the boat? Does she know the rule:

"Reach, throw, and tow, but don't go!"

Reach to the person with
an oar,
a gaff hook,
a life ring with line.
Throw the person
a buoy,
a seat cushion,
milk jugs,
anything that floats.
Tow the person to the boat.

Never get into the water to help a victim. Teach your family to fasten one end of a rope to the boat and attach a buoy to the other end. You will likely use this to pull yourself out of the water if the person you are with does not have the strength to pull you out.

If an Accident Occurs

An important feature of all approved PFDs is that they help keep the head and neck out of the water. These two areas account for over half of your body's heat loss.

Once in the water, you can also delay hypothermia by getting as much of your body out of the water as possible by climbing aboard the overturned boat hull, or by clinging to high-flotation items like buoys or gas cans. When floating, minimize any activity in the water that increases the flow of cold water over your body's surface, such as swimming, treading water, or drownproofing. The best strategy is to cling to a visible and buoyant object, cross your legs, clamp your arms to your chest, and remain as still as possible until rescue.

After the cold-water victim has been rescued, remove all wet clothing and slowly rewarm the body. Two people, lying one on either side of the victim, makes a “human sandwich” for slow, effective rewarming of a hypothermia victim. Call for medical help.

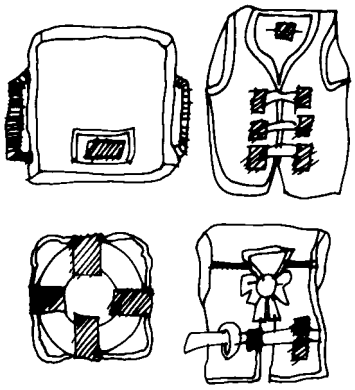
Drowning

You can help prevent accidental drowning by taking the following precautions:

- Wear a PFD that will keep you afloat and help you stay warm in the water.
- Do not drink alcohol and drive a boat. Don’t ride with someone who is or has been drinking.
- Go boating only in safe weather and water conditions. If conditions are unsafe, postpone your outing.
- Keep your boat and motor in good condition.
- Learn to swim.

Fire On Board

Do you have a fire extinguisher on board? Is it inspected annually and refilled when needed? Make sure you have the proper type of fire extinguisher and that it is properly maintained. Every person on board should know its location and review how to use it prior to your trip.



Personal Flotation Devices

You should have a properly fitting PFD for each family member, and children should wear PFDs whenever they are down on the docks or in the boat. Take your family to the pool or shore at least once a year to practice getting into and floating around in the life preservers, float coats, or survival suits. Replace your PFDs when they are worn and have lost their buoyancy, or when they no longer fit your growing child.

Survival Kits

Each person on board should have his or her own survival kit. It should be small enough to fit on the person’s body, and it should be waterproof. Children’s survival kits, put in plastic freezer zipper bags, can be placed in a fanny pack. The contents will depend on your situation, including the PFD that is used, but all should contain signaling devices, shelter, and medication if needed.

University of Alaska
Sea Grant College Program
P.O. Box 755040
Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-5040
fax (907) 474-6285
email fypubs@uaf.edu
http://www.uaf.edu/seagrant