

## Float Plans Save Lives

*By Keith Wohltman, U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 95*

MARCO ISLAND, FL – It was 9:30 pm and Jim’s wife was getting worried. Her husband and three friends had gone off fishing earlier that day and should have been home by now. Jim never mentioned that they might be later than his normal return home time of 5:30 pm. In fact, Jim really hadn’t mentioned much about this trip, not even who was going or where they were headed. Jim’s wife didn’t know what to do, so she called 9-1-1. When asked for details about Jim, the boat and possible location, all she knew was Jim went fishing and his boat was white.

The reason Jim and his fishing buddies were late can range through a wide variety of situations, from life threatening to simple miscommunications. But Jim failed to provide his wife with even basic information about his plans for the day. Jim is a good fisherman and knows the local waters better than most. He is a skilled captain of his boat and keeps it in tip-top condition. His normal fishing day ends before dinner and he always calls his wife if he is going to be even a little late, out of courtesy.

What Jim and all boaters should do before they leave the dock is prepare a Float Plan and leave it with several responsible people. I can see some of you grimacing and saying, “Oh, here we go... paperwork to ruin a fun activity!” I will admit that in the “old days” this was a bit of a chore. But I will explain later how to make this process much easier with the use of a computer or mobile device and the U. S. Coast Guard’s electronic Float Plan.



A float plan is nothing more than some basic information about who will be on a boat, the type of boat, and where the boat is headed. It can be as detailed as you can envision before you shove off and include multiple waypoints, or as simple as providing a general location or single destination. What it shouldn’t be, is a chore.

If you are overdue, or if an emergency occurs onshore while you are out on the water, it gives the Coast Guard a great deal of information to help them find you. Telling your wife, or significant other, you are going fishing at your “secret spot” doesn’t help them at all. Unless, of course, everyone knows your “secret spot!”

The float plan includes: a description of your boat; what safety equipment is onboard; where you plan to go; how many people are onboard; and your intended route, both to and from the destination. As I mentioned, this required a fair amount of effort back in the day. But the Coast Guard’s electronic Float Plan makes it a much simpler process. Go to this website: <http://www.floatplancentral.org/> and click the link to download the current electronic float plan form. As stated on the web page:

“Gone are the days of having to prepare a float plan from scratch each and every time you go boating. Now, you can do it all electronically, using Adobe Reader version 8 or later. You can set up a basic plan ahead of time and save it. Update it when you decide where you’re going to go. Then e-mail the completed plan to whoever you choose to follow up should you not return, or check-in as planned.”



Or you can download and install the **U.S. COAST GUARD MOBILE APP** from the App Store or Google Play. With the app installed you can file a float plan right from your mobile device.

Completing the information required on the form will take about fifteen minutes the first time since you need specific information about your boat and safety equipment. But you only need to do that once. After the first time all you will need to do is to include your destination and vessel occupants.

The plan also includes instructions for the responsible parties who will report you overdue. Having this information will help the Coast Guard find you.

Float Plans Save Lives!

For more information about safe boating courses Joe Riccio, (239)-384-7416 or [CGAUXCOURSES@GMAIL.COM](mailto:CGAUXCOURSES@GMAIL.COM).

To schedule your **FREE** Vessel Safety Check, please call: John Moyer, (239)-248-7078 or Coast Guard Auxiliary Station – Flotilla 95, (239) 394-5911 or email John at [Jmoyer1528@aol.com](mailto:Jmoyer1528@aol.com).

For those interested in joining Flotilla 95, USCG Auxiliary, please call Bob Shmihluk at (215) – 694-3305