

Getting Started/Briefing Guests

By Doug Johnson, U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 95

MARCO ISLAND, FL – Before getting underway, there are a few simple things that can be done to make the trip more enjoyable and safer. Start with checking the weather, tides and your vessels systems and gear and make sure your boat registration is aboard. Your guests should be familiar with your boat and its safety equipment.

It only takes a couple of minutes to show everyone how to start and stop your boat engine and operate the radio. Everyone aboard should know the location of flares, first aid kits, anchor, lines, boat hook and fire extinguisher(s). An easy way to accomplish this is to develop a laminated card for your boat that lists the location of items aboard. Pictured with this article is one example for your reference.

Review marine weather conditions before you leave. When stormy weather or rough water is predicted, you may want to cancel or postpone your trip. Preparing for an emergency is essential considering how isolated the boat may be from all services. When you leave, the day may be warm and sunny, and you may plan to be back before sundown. But trouble can develop, so be prepared for it. Number one on your list should be a reserve supply of drinking water. Include warm clothes too as it can get cold on the water after sundown. It is also a good idea to have a warm blanket or two aboard, and insect repellent. In SW Florida you should always carry sunscreen. On the water, direct and reflected sunlight can combine to give you a bad sunburn, which can be further exacerbated when a strong breeze sensitizes the skin.

Always take your PFDs (life jackets) out of their storage area and put them where they are readily accessible. Before you leave the dock make sure each person is assigned a PFD that fits them and make sure they know how to put it on. It is preferred to have everyone wear a PFD at all times, especially in rough water. It is extremely difficult to don a PFD in the water and in cold water it may be impossible.

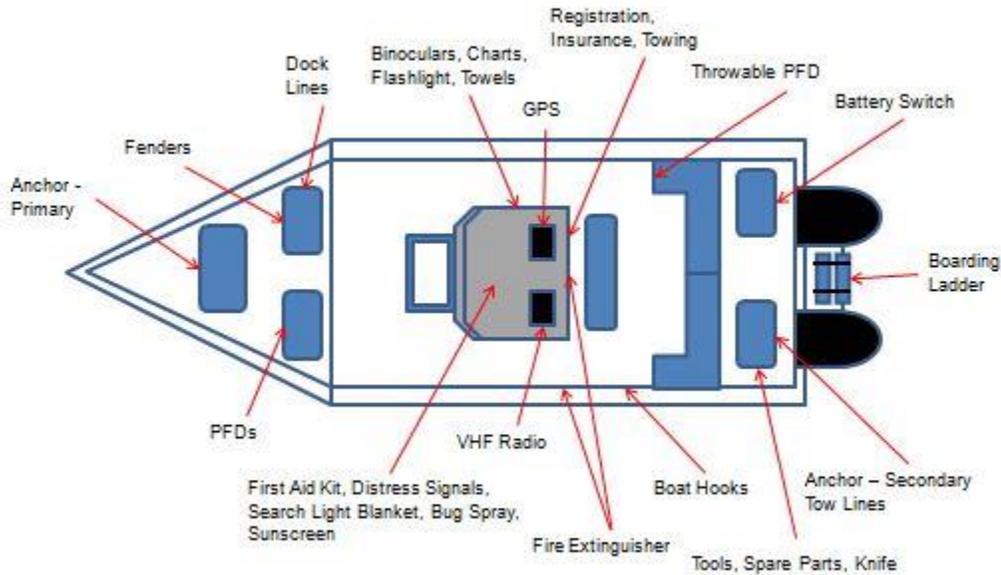
Have you brought all the equipment on board that you will need? Many boaters in SW Florida remove items from their boat after each trip because of the humid weather. Making a check list is an easy way to assure that you will always have needed items on board. You may want to develop a check list of items to always have on board and combine this with a pre-underway check list you review each time before leaving your dock. This information can be placed on the back of the card mentioned above that contains storage locations of your safety equipment. Having this information laminated on a card also protects it from the outside elements and is a quick reference tool. An example of what you might want to include is shown in the accompanying picture. This is just an example, as your list may contain other items.

A “pre-underway” checklist will ensure that your boat’s systems are running smoothly before you go. Don’t leave the dock only to find out that your steering doesn’t work. Take the time to start the engine(s) and check the steering and gears, cooling water flow, oil, electrical systems, and through hull fittings.

Being prepared will increase your boating experience.

To learn more about boating, attend a course offered by the Coast Guard Auxiliary. For more information on courses, email Joe Riccio flotilla95fsope@gmail.com.

For information about joining the Auxiliary, email Bob Shmihluk 215-694-3305



Pre-Underway Checklist

EQUIPMENT		Underway Preparations
<input type="checkbox"/> Aspirin	<input type="checkbox"/> PFDs (life jackets)	<input type="checkbox"/> Fuel System
<input type="checkbox"/> Air horn	<input type="checkbox"/> Rain Gear	<input type="checkbox"/> Secured all openings
<input type="checkbox"/> Binoculars	<input type="checkbox"/> Snacks	<input type="checkbox"/> No loose gear
<input type="checkbox"/> Blanket	<input type="checkbox"/> Sunscreen lotion	<input type="checkbox"/> Ventilated engine compartment
<input type="checkbox"/> Bug Repellant	<input type="checkbox"/> Water	<input type="checkbox"/> Started engine
<input type="checkbox"/> Camera	<input type="checkbox"/> Mooring lines	<input type="checkbox"/> Checked steering
<input type="checkbox"/> Cell Phone	<input type="checkbox"/> Fire Extinguishers	<input type="checkbox"/> Checked gears
<input type="checkbox"/> Charts/Navigation	<input type="checkbox"/> Bucket	<input type="checkbox"/> Oil Pressure
<input type="checkbox"/> Clothing-warm	<input type="checkbox"/> Tools/spare parts	<input type="checkbox"/> Cooling water discharge
<input type="checkbox"/> Compass	<input type="checkbox"/> Anchor	<input type="checkbox"/> Lights
<input type="checkbox"/> Fenders	<input type="checkbox"/> VHF Radio	<input type="checkbox"/> Tested radio
<input type="checkbox"/> First Aid kit	<input type="checkbox"/> GPS	<input type="checkbox"/> Tested GPS
<input type="checkbox"/> Flashlight	<input type="checkbox"/> Boat Registration	
<input type="checkbox"/> Paper/Pen	<input type="checkbox"/> Flares (check the date)	

Images courtesy of Keith Wohltman