

Boating Safety Tips

There's nothing quite like spending the day on your boat with family and friends. Just be sure safety is foremost in your mind. From must-have safety gear to how to safely operate a boat, check out these important boating safety tips:

1) **Be prepared with a boat safety kit**

You can't always predict an emergency, so be prepared for any situation. Your boat safety kit should be kept onboard no matter the size of your boat. Below are some essential items your safety kit should include:

- a. Flashlight – A flashlight and extra batteries can help you see around your boat in the dark and allow you to be seen if you run out of fuel or if your craft stalls.
- b. Duct tape – Spring a leak? Temporarily bandage the hole with duct tape.
- c. Bucket – Even if the boat isn't leaking, water may otherwise enter the vessel. A bucket can help you bail it out.
- d. First aid kit – A properly equipped first aid kit, plus the knowledge on how to use it, is vital in case of an accident or medical emergency.
- e. Whistle – As a recognized signal calling for help on the water, a waterproof whistle is another must-have.
- f. Ropes – These are critical for pulling someone who has fallen overboard, securing your craft to the dock, and tying down loose items in extreme weather.
- g. Mirror – A mirror or any reflective object can signal for help.
- h. Garbage bags – Use them as rain ponchos and protection for items on board.
- i. Fire extinguisher – Just because you're on the water doesn't mean you can't have an onboard fire. All passengers should know the location of your fire extinguisher and how to use it. Fire extinguishers must be inspected and tested every 5 years, it's the law.
- j. Life jackets – You should have a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket for every person on board. Read on for information on picking out the right life jackets.

2) **Bring the proper life jackets**

Life jackets do more than simply keep you afloat. Many are designed to turn an unconscious person face-up and even help prevent hypothermia. By law, all boats must have a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket for each person on board. Some states also require children to wear life jackets at all times. Choose a life jacket that is right for your height and weight, plus:

- a. Try it on before purchasing. Fasten the vest, hold your arms straight up over your head and have someone gently pull the top of the arm opening to make sure it fits snugly.
- b. Auto and manual inflatable life vests can turn an unconscious wearer face-up, but they require regular maintenance. They're also not recommended for children under 16 years of age.
- c. If you're going fishing, look for a life jacket with pockets and straps to easily carry tackle and supplies.
- d. There are many types of life jackets on the market. Make sure the one you buy is appropriate for your on-water activity.

3) **Check the weather beforehand**

Warm, sunny days are ideal for boating, but you can't always predict when a storm will roll in. Varying gusts of wind and choppy water are signs of an approaching storm. And even if it's a warm spring day, the water could instead reflect winter temperatures. In the event

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that your boat capsizes or you and your passengers get wet, make sure you have a plan to seek help and get dry.

4) **Don't overload the boat with people or equipment**

Always follow your boat's capacity restriction. Overloading your boat with passengers or equipment can unbalance your craft.

5) **Check for harmful fumes**

- a. After refueling your boat, open all the hatches and smell for fumes. If detected, don't start the engine.
- b. Carbon monoxide can accumulate in and around your boat and unexpectedly knock you or your guests unconscious. Be aware of all the places fumes and gases can accumulate, including:
 - i. Inadequately ventilated canvas enclosures
 - ii. Enclosed spaces
 - iii. Blocked exhaust outlets
 - iv. Nearby boats
 - v. When your engine is idling, running at a slow speed or stopped

6) **Use common sense on the water**

Rules on the water aren't much different than rules on the road. It's important to use common sense, such as staying alert at all times, operating at a safe speed, and ensuring that passengers stay safely within the boat's railings.

7) **Follow proper anchoring procedures**

Having the right anchor isn't enough. To keep the wind from dragging your boat, you may need to drop two anchors in a V-formation at the front of the craft to keep it from drifting. To help prevent the tide from lifting your anchor, you may need to drop it in deeper water – about 20-30 feet or so.

8) **Follow proper docking procedures**

Depending on the wind, the current, and your type of boat, docking can be a challenge. As you approach the dock or shore, make sure your bumpers are out to prevent damage to your craft, reduce your speed, and make sure the docking lines are secured. If the wind is blowing towards the shore, bring the boat about two feet from the dock and the wind will gently pull it in. You can then secure it with lines. If the wind is blowing away from the shore, approach the dock at a 20 - to 30-degree angle to compensate for the wind. Then secure the bowline.

9) **Take a boating safety course**

The U.S. Coast Guard estimates that 70% of boating accidents are caused by operator error. Before you leave the dock, make sure you know the rules and your responsibilities. There are several online courses available, including a few free courses. The Boat US Foundation offers a free online boating safety course developed specifically for each individual state. The U.S. Coast Guard offers an additional list of online and hands-on courses for boating safety.

10) **Get your boat checked**

The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and the United States Power Squadrons offer free Vessel Safety Checks. There is no charge, and there are no consequences if your boat doesn't pass.

No matter how much you prepare to keep yourself, passengers, and your boat safe, accidents can happen. Learn more about protecting your prized vessel with boat insurance.