



Don's Six Cardinal Rules

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Craft Advisories are meant for YOU. It is a warning that weather conditions do, or will, present an elevated safety risk for vessels under 20 meters, so unless your boat is bigger than 65 feet, a small craft advisory is a recommendation that you re-evaluate your plans for that day.

Cardinal Rule #4

Life Preservers Are Called "Life" Preservers Because they Preserve Lives.

Life Preservers are your seat belts on the water, but like a seat belt they don't work unless you buckle up. We seem to have a "thing" about life jackets. We don't even think about putting them on until the band starts playing on the deck of the Titanic: wrong! In the entire history of man traversing the water, there has never been a single documented case of a life jacket neatly stowed under the forward bunk EVER saving the life of a single soul.

When to wear life jackets:

Adults - Whenever conditions are not PERFECT: the engine isn't running right, the waves are higher than usual, the weather looks threatening, the bilge seems higher than normal, ANYTHING not normal.

Adults boating alone - all the time.
Children under 13 - When on deck underway. Better yet, ALL the time.

The statistics are indisputable. The Coast Guard reported 676 boating related fatalities in 2004; 431 of them (by Coast Guard estimates) could have been avoided by the simple act of wearing a life preserver.

How do you get your passengers comfortable with the idea of putting on life jackets? Put on yours first. Explain that this is you just being overly cautious. Indulge me. Nothing to get nervous about.

Cardinal Rule #5

Your VHF Radio Is Your On-Water Lifeline, Not Your Cell Phone.

Your VHF Radio is your party line to the Coast Guard, county police, bay constables, fire and emergency units, and most of your fellow boaters. They all monitor Channel 16. Your cell phone is specific to

the one person you call. The Coast Guard has very sensitive receivers and can hear you anywhere in the bay and near coastal areas even if you are using a hand held. When you need help, you want as many people as possible to know about it. Why? Because the help you need may be as close as the next boat. The next boat can help you sooner than the closest rescue unit. If you have a medical emergency or injury, the person in the next boat may be a doctor, nurse, trained EMT. You need pumps to control flooding? The next boat may have one. Man Overboard situation? The other boat may be smaller and easier to use for recovery.

Teach your family and your frequent guests how to use the VHF radio. (Push to talk, release to listen.) Show them the special button for Channel 16. Prepare them to answer the three questions the CG will ask: "What is the nature of your emergency? Where are you located? What is the description of your boat?" If you have a GPS or Loran, show them (your family/guests) how to obtain latitude/longitude numbers for your location. If not, point out prominent landmarks that they can use as reference points. Describe your boat by make, model, color of hull and topsides. Rescue people know what a Grady White or Sea Ray looks like, and they know the difference between a walk around and a center console. Radio protocol is nice but not essential. Plain English works just fine. But radio courtesy is a MUST. Your VHF radio is a party line. When you are transmitting, everyone around you is blocked out, so make your transmissions brief, and don't crash someone else's transmission.

Cardinal Rule #6

Don't Leave Your Brains on the Dock.

The most important and essential safety device you have aboard your boat is your common sense. Use it. Trust your instincts. If something doesn't "feel" right, DON'T DO IT. And don't assume the other guy knows what he is doing or is paying attention to what he is doing or even realizes what he is doing is dangerous. Drive defensively with the attitude that other guy is out to get you. He probably is - even though he may not be aware of it.