

# On the Water... Be Weather Aware!

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Severe weather has always been and continues to be one of the greatest and most persistent threats to safe boating. Despite many advances in technology and modern weather forecasting, during the approaching summer months, thunderstorms and lightning are an ever-present threat and can pop up out of nowhere on hot and humid days.

- Never leave the dock or boat launch with first checking local weather reports. Know the general weather patterns in our area characterized by later afternoon/early evening thunderstorms that build during the day.
- Remain vigilant when you are on the water no matter how good the sailing, cruising or fishing is or how much fun everyone is having. All boaters know that feeling of dread when you first notice an ominous sky approaching.
- A good weather app or radar will assist greatly in helping you ascertain whether that approaching cloud bank is a brief shower or a major storm.
- Communicating with fellow boaters on different sides of the storm using your VHF radio or cell phone can provide timely knowledge of the storm's size and duration.
- Know the waters in which you are boating and have a plan for when and where to seek shelter or safe harbor as may be necessary.
- Look for tall anvil topped cumulus clouds as a sure sign of an impending storm. Read the water for sudden changes in color, wind direction or wave action. One seasoned old captain I sailed with in Turkey use to call the whitecaps from cresting waves in the distance "sheep". Avoid "sheep" whenever you can.
- For those of us who have spent a lot of time on the water, you can develop a sixth sense of when conditions may start to deteriorate. You can smell and feel an approaching storm. Lightning splits atmospheric nitrogen and oxygen molecules. These can combine into nitric oxide, which, with further interactions, forms ozone that is then carried downwind ahead of the rain with its characteristic fresh scent. That scent over water often combined with a sharp change in temperature or wind direction is a stark warning sign. Do not ignore Mother Nature when she tells you what she's about to unleash!

It's important to know the capabilities and potential vulnerabilities of your boat should you ultimately find yourself on the water in adverse weather and sea conditions.

- Ensure everyone is wearing their life preserver. Stay low and inside your boat.
- Make sure your bilge pumps are in working order.
- Have a backup plan and gear for hand bailing if necessary.

- Turn off as many electrical systems as you safely can and avoid sustained contact with metal surfaces. Use your radar if you have one or one of many mobile device apps to track the storm. One low tech way to track approaching lightning is to turn on your AM band radio. Lightning causes variations in the amplitude of AM signals and typically sounds like interference or static. The same is not true for FM radio. You may hear AM interference before you hear thunder or observe lightning and it may give you a slight edge in beating a storm back to safe harbor.

If, God forbid, things get really bad, involve your passengers or crew in mustering a waterproof ditch bag while you maintain a controlled, safe heading and speed at no less than a 45 degree angle into the waves. Ditch bag contents should include an EPIRB (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon), flare kits, handheld radio with extra batteries, flashlights, glow sticks and a First Aid kit. Try to avoid obvious squall lines and waterspouts that are not uncommon in our area waters. If you see a waterspout, pilot your boat at right angles away from the funnel cloud. Most (but not all) tornadoes not associated with a named storm in our area generally track west to east, so if you are on the water, you can best avoid them by heading north or south. Never approach a water spout as its movement can be highly unpredictable.

This article is given the courtesy of your local America's Boating Club of the Pamlico. We are offering a Basic Weather Seminar on Tuesday, July 25<sup>th</sup> from 6:30 to 9:00 pm. To register or learn more contact Kelly by email at [pspsed@gmail.com](mailto:pspsed@gmail.com) or call 551-427-0585. We invite you to visit <https://pamlicosailandpowersquadron.org> to learn more about what we can offer in the areas of Boating Education & Safety.