

# Boating Tips

## Firefighting On Your Boat

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Fire prevention is far, far better than firefighting. No two boating fires are the same. Boating fires happen at the dock as well as when underway with sailboat, cruiser or john boat with an outboard. A fuel fire is most prevalent followed by electrical then cooking fires.



With a fuel fire, without endangering yourself, shut off the fuel for a better chance fighting the fire. Electrical fires typically originate in the power distribution box or under a dash or console. Cooking fires are identical to those at home, usually grease.

When fighting a fire, turn off the engine. Have everyone put on a lifejacket as well as move away from the fire. Have a crew member issue a mayday call. If possible, throw out an anchor.

Quickly assess the situation. An engine room fire, DO NOT open the hatch as that introduces air to the fire causing a flash, possibly explosion. Can you successfully fight this fire? How much time do you have since fiberglass boats burn quickly? I've heard you have 5 minutes to extinguish a boat fire before abandoning ship. Boats are replaceable; lives are not, so err with caution and abandon early. Toxic fumes can overcome the crew before the flames reach them.

As a responsible boater, you should have several all-purpose (ABC) fire extinguishers. Larger than required along with too many fire extinguishers are not enough. A boating friend experienced a fire while underway. They said they emptied all six extinguishers (three were required) yet were unable to extinguish a fire. Six extinguishers gave them a few extra minutes to grab important papers, passports, wallets, water and snack bars plus handheld radio before abandoning ship to their inflatable dinghy. Their sailboat burned to the water line. The USCG rescued them in a few hours and they are back sailing the Great Lakes.

To use an extinguisher, pull the pin locking the handle. Squeeze the handle. Aim at the base of the fire in a slow, sweeping motion to draw fire suppressant into the fire to cut off oxygen. Aiming at the middle or top simply blows the suppressant away. Empty the fire extinguisher(s) on the fire to prevent the fire reigniting.

Never use water to fight a boating fire.

If successful you saved lives as well as the boat. Reassess the situation particularly the seaworthiness of the damaged vessel. Do you have a working radio? Can you make way?

Prevent fires rather than fight them. In fire extinguishers, more in quantity and capacity is better. Issue a mayday call. Put on life jackets and move away from the fire. Honestly, you have 5 minutes or less before abandoning ship.

Important Notice of a Recall: <https://www.usps.org/index.php/departments/12000/12900>

For more details relating to fire extinguishers, you may find the following links useful:

<https://www.boaterexam.com/boating-resources/boat-fire-extinguishers.aspx>

[http://www.boatingbasicsonline.com/content/general/4\\_2\\_c.htm](http://www.boatingbasicsonline.com/content/general/4_2_c.htm)

This article is given courtesy of the Pamlico Sail & Power Squadron, America's Boating Club. FREE Vessel Safety Checks are available. Contact Fred at [VSC@pspsnc.com](mailto:VSC@pspsnc.com) or call him at 948-0682 to schedule your inspection. The Squadron is also offering popular and informative Seamanship Course to the public. It is scheduled to begin June 5<sup>th</sup>. To learn more, email our Education Officer at [psps@gmail.com](mailto:psps@gmail.com) or contact Linda at 252-964-3009.