

Can Anyone Aboard Save the Captain?

Boating Tips

Biff Matthews
United States Power Squadrons®
Pamlico Sail & Power Squadron

Boating emergencies come in all forms; illness, accident, fire, taking on water or man over board (MOB).

Who runs the boat when the captain is incapacitated, injured or worse? Who runs the boat when the captain is deeply involved in an emergency such as MOB or taking on water?

It is the captain's responsibility to have a first mate. The first mate is the second in command, a designated person hopefully trained and experienced in boat operation plus handling emergencies. On a recreational boat, the first mate's role often falls to the spouse or a close friend of the captain.

Captains, can your spouse or friend operate your boat? Can they operate the radio, manage the sails or start or stop the engine as well as operate the throttle and transmission controls? Are they capable of docking the boat? Can the first mate operate the navigation system if aboard? Do they know how to operate the bilge pumps or anchor the boat? Do they know the location of first aid kit along with basic first aid? Do they first know fire extinguisher locations, plus how to properly use one?

All of these are what are called active tasks, performing a function or operation. We didn't learn to ride a bike by reading a book. It is critically important for the first mate to run the boat with the captain at their side. Eventually the captain may also relax and enjoy the trip.

How important is a good first mate. True story, sail boat race, husband and wife teams, husband had heart attack. His wife knew enough to drop the sails, begin CPR plus radio for help. Unfortunately her husband did not make it. Still, she had enough skills to attempt saving him while saving herself had the boat crashed.

Captains, it is your responsibility to invest the time or money to have a competent first mate. Guys, I understand if you and your wife lack the patience for first mate

training. Ask a capable boating friend or invest in a hands on boating school. A competent first mate can save a life as well as save a boat.

It's also important to have whoever is the first mate, your wife or good friend, also complete a safe boating course. Having more than one first mate is also advised, one for each boating situation.

This article is given courtesy of the Pamlico Sail & Power Squadron. The Squadron schedules boating education courses and seminars throughout the year. A Mastering Rules of the Road Seminar is scheduled for 11/18. To learn more email our Education Officer at psps@gmail.com or contact Linda at 252-964-3009.