

US COAST GUARD AUXILIARY - Marco Island Flotilla 95

Fire Fighting On Your Boat

By Keith Wohltman

"Four boaters were rescued from the waters off Egmont Key as their boat burned Sunday afternoon (May 19, 2013)," according to the US Coast Guard. You read headlines like this and wonder what you would do if a fire broke out on your boat. How would you handle the situation?

The first line of defense against fires on your boat is a fire extinguisher. Of course, you know all about fire extinguishers right? Perhaps they came with your boat when you bought it, or you remember a fire safety demonstration you attended some years ago. But do you know if your extinguishers are appropriate for your boat and how to use them? When was the last time you checked them?

Any fire onboard a boat has the potential to destroy the boat or cause significant injury to you or your passengers. You need to know the right type of fire extinguisher and proper size and how to use it.

Fire fighting on a recreational boat is dangerous and should only be attempted if the fire is small and in its early stage. You have about two minutes to detect and fight a boat fire. The size of your fire extinguishers limits their effectiveness. A typical small marine fire extinguisher has a discharge time of only about eight to ten seconds and that is not much time to fight a fire.

Remember to use the P. A. S. S. process to attack a fire

- **P**ull the pin
- **A**im at the base of the fire
- **S**queeze the handle
- **S**weep side to side

If underway and a fire starts, position the boat so the fire is downwind and then stop the boat. Shut down all systems. Have everyone not already wearing a lifejacket put one on. Try to turn off the fuel source, if safe to do so. Then grab the extinguisher. While you fight the fire, have one of your crew make a Mayday call to the Coast Guard on VHF-FM Channel 16. Have the crew move to the opposite end of the boat, usually the bow. Be prepared to abandon ship if the fire gets out of control.

PWC operators need to take special care in case of fire. Their fire extinguishers may not be easily accessible when fire strikes. Because of this, they should swim away quickly and use another PWC's extinguisher. PWC operators should not open the engine compartment to put out the fire.

Boats with an enclosed engine compartment that use gasoline for electrical generation, mechanical power, or propulsion are required to be equipped with a ventilation system. The ventilation system can be a natural ventilation system or a powered ventilation system. A powered system is required for each compartment in a boat that has a permanently installed gasoline engine with a cranking motor for remote starting. A powered ventilation system consists of one or more exhaust blowers.

Warning - Gasoline vapors can explode. Before starting engine, operate blower at least **four minutes** and check the engine compartment bilge for gasoline vapors.

All boat owners are responsible for keeping their vessel's ventilation systems in operating condition. This means making sure openings are free of obstructions, ducts and ducting are not blocked or torn, blowers operate properly, and worn components are replaced with equivalent marine-type equipment.

Remember -- Clean your bilges and keep them free of debris or trash. This will reduce the risk of fire.

Please use common sense and do not smoke while fueling the boat.

For more information about safe boating contact Doug Johnson of USCG Auxiliary Flotilla 95 (239) 642-8406. For a FREE vessel safety inspection, contact John Moyer (239) 248-7078.

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Photo Courtesy of TowBoatU.S., Jamaica Bay