

By, Wilbur B. Scott

THE MARINE ENVIROMENT

I guess I do not have to tell anyone who has been outside recently that it has been, and is mighty warm out there! Whether you are working in the yard, just out for a walk, relaxing on the beach or out on the water in your boat you know that it is hot! As the season progresses, so too will the hot temperatures!

Flotilla 15-4 of your U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary would like to remind their boating friends that exposure to the sun while on the water can be dangerous. The effects of the sun and heat combined with the marine environment require special precautionary measures. Many boaters are not familiar with the "Marine Environmental Fatigue Syndrome". This condition can affect both your judgment and coordination and is caused by prolonged exposure to the sun, wind, motion, noise and occasional breathing of exhaust fumes.

These conditions are amplified during Florida's hot summer months because of the heat and humidity. While the use of alcohol is never recommended for operators of any vessel, it is especially dangerous under these conditions. The effects of this syndrome produce lack of coordination, poor judgment and just plain fatigue. The use of alcohol can only add to an already serious and dangerous situation.

I am sure that most of you have seen the damage the hot sun can do to your boat or vehicle's paint. With that in mind just imagine what it can do to your unprotected skin and to your eyes as well! Sunscreen with a high SPF number should be worn. Studies have shown that these products may lose their effectiveness both in their container and on your skin. They need to be purchased at least annually and stored aboard in a cooler. Since heat tends to break down their preservatives, the lotion should be reapplied often throughout the day.

Ultraviolet type A rays (UVA) not only causes sunburn, it causes skin cancer as well! It can also be responsible for the development of skin wrinkles and cause damage to the eyes. Boaters should protect their eyes with a good pair of UV-rated sunglasses. Wearing lightweight long clothing not only protects boaters from the sun, but also helps the body maintain a proper temperature. Bathing suits may be the traditional clothing worn for a summer boating outing, but long, lightweight clothing holds perspiration and helps cool the body. Wearing a wide brim hat can shade you as well. In fact, several years ago the U.S. Coast Guard, because of the extreme heat of the sun over our local waters, authorized the adoption of the "Tilley" hat for use by members of their Coast Guard Auxiliary boat crews. They are a wide brim hat that offers extra protection from the elements for the crew while conducting safety patrols and other outdoor activities such as conducting free vessel safety checks for boaters.

So what do we do if someone on board should succumb to the heat? Obviously it is important to detect the problem as early as possible before heat prostration or heat stroke occurs. At the first sign of a heat-related problem, give the person lots of water or a sports electrolytic-replacing drink. Cool them down. Bathe them with wet cloths and fan them. Drinks with alcohol and sugar may taste good, but actually aid in the dehydration. Remember too that older folks and children lose body fluids faster. Another important reminder is to be sure everyone who will be on board, bring with them any prescription medicine they are required to take. The Boy Scouts of America have as their motto, "Be Prepared". That, in my opinion should be the motto of every boater as well!

Another thing, you may plan to be on the water for only a short time. But if your engine should fail you could be out there for a very long time. Be sure that you have emergency rations on board to survive, as

well as all of the required safety equipment. Hopefully you left a “Float Plan” behind with someone before setting out on your fishing or pleasure boating activity. This is an easy thing for a wise skipper to do. Just jot down a description of your vessel including the color, number and name of your vessel, where you intend to go, the route you plan to follow, how long you expect to be there and when you plan to be back as well as what time folks should begin to worry and notify authorities. Then just leave it with someone who will miss you if you fail to return and who will call the U.S. Coast Guard station for this area located in Yankeetown, FL at 352-447-6900. Oh, one thing more, include in your “Float Plan” a description of your tow vehicle and where you plan to launch from.

Have a safe and fun time on the water!

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