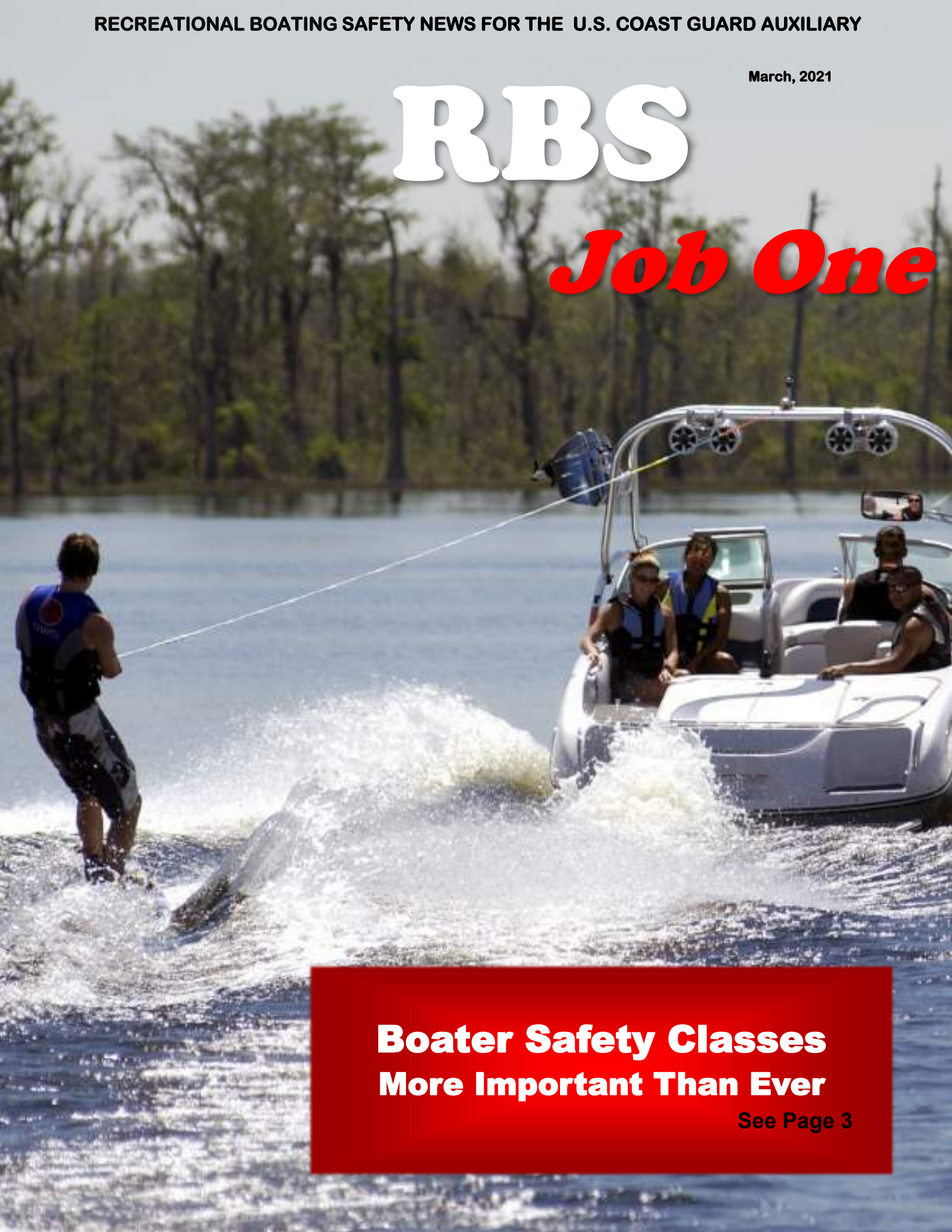


March, 2021

RBS

Job One



**Boater Safety Classes
More Important Than Ever**

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RBS *Job One*

March 2021

Publication of the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary
Recreational Boating Safety Directorates

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Recreational boating activity soared during the 2020 boating season. So did on-water accidents.

(Pre-COVID photo courtesy of US Coast Guard Boating Safety Division)

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A New Look at Public Boating Safety Classes

Real World Success Stories

By Sydney Hay, BC-BRE

When shopping for a new boat early last summer, I was surprised at how little inventory was available at local dealers. Even the resale market was tighter than I ever remembered it. Over and over, the same explanation was offered by those working in boating sales: COVID.

It appears that after enduring the springtime months with various “shelter-in-place” requirements across the country, our home-bound friends and neighbors were looking to boating as a way to safely get out of the house into the fresh air and sunshine while maintaining distance from non-family members.

One salesman expressed his concern to me when he offered, “I’m selling a lot of boats. I can’t acquire new boats fast enough to meet the demand.”

What he said next was alarming, “My concern is that,

while I’m selling lots of boats, some of them very powerful, I’m selling mostly to people who have never operated one before and have no understanding of boating rules and regs.”

This, at a time when most of the usual auxiliary patrolling was at a standstill. Even the auxiliary boating safety classes were shut down due to the pandemic.

A recipe for disaster.

Auxiliary units across the country rose to the challenge. What follows are two case studies about how they did it, the success they’ve had, and what they learned to guide public education into the future.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



One of many recent online Boater Safety Classes is captured by screen shot.

(Photo by Karen Miller)

A View from the Deck Plate, or Finding Solutions When the End of the World is Looming

By Karen Miller, FSO-PE, Clearwater, Florida

Just like Chicken Little, many of us felt like the sky was falling and it was the end of the world. Something like the 2004 *The Day After Tomorrow* or the 1996 *12 Monkeys*. Thoughts we never had before – that it was just make-believe. Wearing masks? Not going to a movie theatre? Cardboard sports fans? Complete Auxiliary stand-down? Who could relate to this “new normal?” This isn’t the world we know – please let me wake up from this nightmare.

Hello? Wouldn’t you know it? March 2020 was just a little over two months into my first stint as Flotilla Staff Officer-Public Education for the Clearwater, Florida Flotilla. Nothing says “boating safety” like a rapidly spreading pandemic. A super-virus, uncertainty, fear, and a lockdown do wonders for our Recreational Boating Safety mission.

My role, like that of so many other Auxiliarists, other than cringing in the corner of my home office in what were once loose fitting sweat pants, has been to seek out ways to carry on our very important boating safety classes. And to find some way to keep everyone — instructors and students — safe through it all. Ideas anyone?

Happily, the Public Education Directorate coordinated with the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) and the individual states and came up with a policy modification. We could actually teach our NASBLA certification courses virtually via videoconferencing. Maybe the world I know wasn’t coming to an end after all. Our role as Auxiliarists was relevant after all! We could teach again, albeit remotely.

While all the negotiating was going on with NASBLA and we were wallowing in self-pity, the boating public still wanted to take classes. We kept telling them, “no.” Yet they kept calling and emailing and asking for classes. And boat sales started to skyrocket.

Then we got the OK. By June, we were up and running. This required that we learn to communicate in a whole new manner. We had to choose a presentation platform. My flotilla opted for Zoom.

Then, we had to learn how to use it – how to present



Knot-tying demonstrations like this one by Larry Cook of Lake Allatoona, GA have adapted to online instruction. (Pre-COVID photo by Greg Fonzeno)

to our students just as though we were standing in front of them in the classroom. My flotilla uses the gallery view of Zoom extensively and we practiced and practiced some more.

We had to figure out how to register the students and get paid for classes when the students couldn’t stand in front of the registration desk and hand us their forms and money. We decided on PayPal and mailing checks made out to the flotilla and mailed to my home address. We also employed an online registration form that we already used for class members who would register in advance.

Then how would we get the students the books and brochures and pamphlets we normally gave them the first morning of class? We decided on packaging up the book and materials and using the Post Office’s media mail to minimize cost. Yes, this meant someone had to go out in public and drop the material at the post office. Refreshingly, the local post office was taking CDC guidelines very seriously and I never felt unsafe.

Then, how could we schedule classes so the students and instructors didn’t get screen fatigue. My flotilla always taught our classes over a Saturday and Sunday from 0800 to 1300. Five hours sitting at a computer wasn’t going to work. So, we re-arranged the whole



Auxiliarist Judi Bidwick, of Venice, FL makes her boating safety classes interesting by introducing props.
(Pre-COVID photo by Al Bidwick)

tries responded with travel bans, domestic quarantines, and emergency measures. And in our CGAUX world, a stand-down was mandated for all face-to-face activities. PE classes came to a halt...but, we pivoted.

On April 6, 2020, a small dedicated group of District 7, Division 6 Member Training Officers began to self-teach themselves video conferencing, Zoom videoconferencing platform to be specific. On April 8, they began experimenting with virtual member training classes, and began exploring with Public Education Officers how to apply that knowledge to holding external PE classes virtually. Step-by-step, FSO-PEs and instructors are re-tooling the course components to teach boaters virtually while attracting more students and potential new flotilla members.

And on 1 June, the first CGAUX Virtual PE Class was held with two instructors, an observer, and 25 students. Two weeks later, the second ABS class followed, and by the end of September, several flotillas had completed multiple classes, taught an estimated 500+ students virtually, and calculate earnings of over \$10,000 in class fees.

Where did these students come from? One flotilla already has virtually taught as many students as it did the entire year prior. Interestingly, referral relationships with boating rental companies generated about one third, recommendations from students brought in

about a third and good publicity and sales service brought in the rest.

And virtual classes meant that the market for boating classes multiplied. The original market, face-to-face class, expanded to those interested in online classes which in turn exploded into video classes with CGAUX Instructors.

What happened to interest these boaters in our new virtual classes? Whether they seek a NASBLA-approved state boating certificate or knowledge and skills gained directly from our experienced instructors, boaters seek to make their experience on the water safer for their families and more enjoyable for themselves.

Students are now connecting virtually from across the state and are no longer limited to driving distance. Families are taking the virtual classes together from the comfort of their homes. And students enjoy the interaction of seeing each other and the instructors on the video screen.

And personal referrals are traditionally the best source of new students. The best time to find us is when boaters are making a boating-related decision. Many service providers can benefit their clients by recommending CGAUX Virtual PE Classes. Building relationships with those vendors can pay off with a steady stream of referrals. And if the relationship is cultivated, it keeps on giving, and it builds upon itself year after year. Formal and informal referrals can be repetitive and cumulative, low cost, and rewarding.

And how else do these students learn about our virtual classes? Sign up for them? Timely publicity and personal attention.

A smoothly functioning team of flotilla staff officers can achieve significant results with coordinated teamwork. A clear website, a rich calendar with frequent multiple offerings, active Facebook friends, a targeted video, special interest articles with local community papers, local TV interviews for the evening news, local radio, boating, fishing hunting programs, and public service ads, all these offer steady opportunities. And, above all, a sign-up procedure where a knowledgeable Auxiliarist answers all inquiries personally and quickly, enrolling the inquiring boater seamlessly.

Pandemic + pivot = PE staff officers and instructors growing the classes and the number of students that we reach, virtually. Ω

Emergency Engine Cut-Off Switches Save Lives

By Sydney Hay, BC-BRE



A PWC operator enjoys fun on the water with a properly installed engine cut-off device attached to her life jacket. (Pre-COVID photo courtesy of the US Coast Guard Office of Boating Safety)

Phyllis and Bob Kopytko were sharing a delightful day of fishing with an experienced guide when the three decided to move from one fishing spot to seek out a better one. As the guide fired up their vessel, powered by a single outboard motor and headed out, he made a deadly mistake.

Suddenly, without warning, the vessel veered hard to the right and all three were thrown into the water. The deadly mistake? Failing to attach an engine cut-off device, a proven safety device used to stop the boat's engine should the operator unexpectedly fall overboard. Whether the boat hits a wave, a wake, takes a sharp turn, runs into a submerged object, suffers steering failure, or a myriad of possibilities, if the operator forgets this important safety procedure — attaching a cut-off device — the results can be catastrophic.

“We had a wonderful time that day, and we caught a bunch of fish,” Phyllis said. Then, the day turned deadly. “All three of us got thrown out of the boat and I turned around really quickly and saw the bow of the boat headed right toward me,” Phyllis continued. “I pushed myself off the boat and when I did that, the

propeller just started slashing me.”

Phyllis called out to her husband, “I love you, Bob!” And that was the last she saw of him. “He was completely mowed down.”

On that day, Phyllis Kopytko lost her husband of 19 years. “And I lost a big part of myself,” she said holding back tears. “All because of not engaging an emergency engine cut-off switch.”

Each year, many boating accidents involve an operator and/or passengers who fall overboard. Wearing an engine cut-off switch lanyard not only ensures that the vessel or personal watercraft (PWC) stays close, it also prevents the operator or passengers from being run over. When the operator isn't wearing a lanyard, the unmanned boat tends to run in hard, fast circles, often resulting in severe injury or death from a propeller strike. The jet of water that comes out the steering nozzle of a PWC or jet boat is also extremely hazardous. It is powerful enough to cause serious internal injuries, permanent disability, or death. Wearing the lanyard cuts the risk dramatically.

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Engine Cut-off Switch Wear Requirement

Over the last few years, the United States Congress has passed laws requiring boat manufacturers to install engine cut-off switches on recreational vessels and to require recreational vessel operators to use them.

Beginning on April 1 of this year, operators of recreational vessels less than 26 feet in length will be required to use an Emergency Engine Cut-off Switch (ECOS) and associated Engine Cut-off Switch Link (ECOSL) as the Coast Guard implements a new law passed by Congress. The link is usually a lanyard-style cord clipped onto the operator's person, PFD or clothing and the other end attached to the cut-off switch either in close proximity to the helm or on the outboard motor itself if the vessel is operated by a tiller. When enough tension is applied, the ECOSL disen-

gages from the ECOS and the motor is automatically shut down. Wireless ECOS have recently been developed and are also approved for use.

Owners of recreational vessels manufactured after December, 2019 are also required to maintain the ECOS on their vessel in operational condition. Using the ECOSL is not required when the helm is within an enclosed cabin. Other common situations where ECOSL use is not required include when docking or trailering, when trolling, or when operating in no-wake zones. The Coast Guard has put together a list of frequently asked questions (FAQs) and other educational materials on this new boating safety requirement.

The full list of FAQs is found here:

[https://uscgboating.org/recreational-boaters/Engine-](https://uscgboating.org/recreational-boaters/Engine-Cut-Off-Switch-FAQ.php)

ENGINE CUT-OFF DEVICES FAQs

[Cut-Off-Switch-FAQ.php](https://uscgboating.org/recreational-boaters/Engine-Cut-Off-Switch-FAQ.php)

Some of the most common include the following:

What is an Engine Cut-off Switch (ECOS)?

An Engine Cut-Off Switch is a safety mechanism used to shut off propulsion machinery when the operator is displaced from the helm.

What is an Engine Cut-Off Switch Link (ECOSL)?

An ECOSL is the device that connects the operator to the ECOS. The link must be attached to the operator, the operator's clothing, or operator's personal floatation device. It is typically a coiled lanyard, but may also be an electronic fob.

Who needs to use an Engine Cut-off Switch Link ECOSL?

All operators of recreational boats less than 26' in length that have an Engine Cut-Off Device installed.

Why is it important to use an Engine Cut-Off Switch Link?

Boats can make sudden and forceful turns that create enough torque to eject an operator from the helm area or completely out of the boat. If thrown out of the boat, there is always the danger of a spinning propeller, especially since an unmanned boat can often start traveling in circles at the point where the ejection took place. Wearing your Engine Cut-Off Switch Link immediately stops the engine and allows the operator to regain control of the boat.

What are the benefits of using my Engine Cut-Off Switch and Engine Cut-Off Switch Link?

Engine cut-off switches are an important tool to prevent unnecessary accidents, injuries and deaths caused by a recreational vessel operator being unexpectedly displaced from the helm. This includes situations where the operator is ejected from the vessel, which typically leads to a runaway vessel. In these scenarios anyone in the water is a potential propeller-strike victim, all other vessels on the water face a collision hazard, and maritime law enforcement officers face additional risk in trying to bring the runaway vessel to a stop.

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What boats need to have an Engine Cut-Off Switch installed?

Boats less than 26 feet in length that generate more than 115lbs of static thrust (~ 2-3hp) and were built beginning in January 2020. If the boats' primary helm is inside an enclosed cabin, it is not required to have an Engine Cut-Off Switch.

I recently bought a 2020 model year boat; am I required to ensure that the Engine Cut-Off Switch and Engine Cut-Off Switch Link work?

Maybe. It depends on when the boat was built. If the boat was built in January 2020 or later, the Engine Cut-Off Switch systems must be maintained in working condition for the life of the boat. Just like navigation lights or exhaust blowers.

What is a "covered recreational vessel"?

The term "covered recreational vessel" means a recreational vessel that is (A) less than 26 feet overall in length; and (B) capable of developing 115 pounds or more of static thrust (which equates to about 3 horsepower).

My boat doesn't have an Engine Cut-Off Switch, do I need to install one?

No, unless the boat was built on or after 1 JAN 2020. The installation requirement applies to manufacturers,



The safety of children aboard this recreational vessel is enhanced not only by lifejackets, but also by the Emergency Engine Cut-Off Switch Link (ECOSL) attached to the operator's PFD.

(Pre-COVID photo courtesy of the US Coast Guard Boating Safety Division)

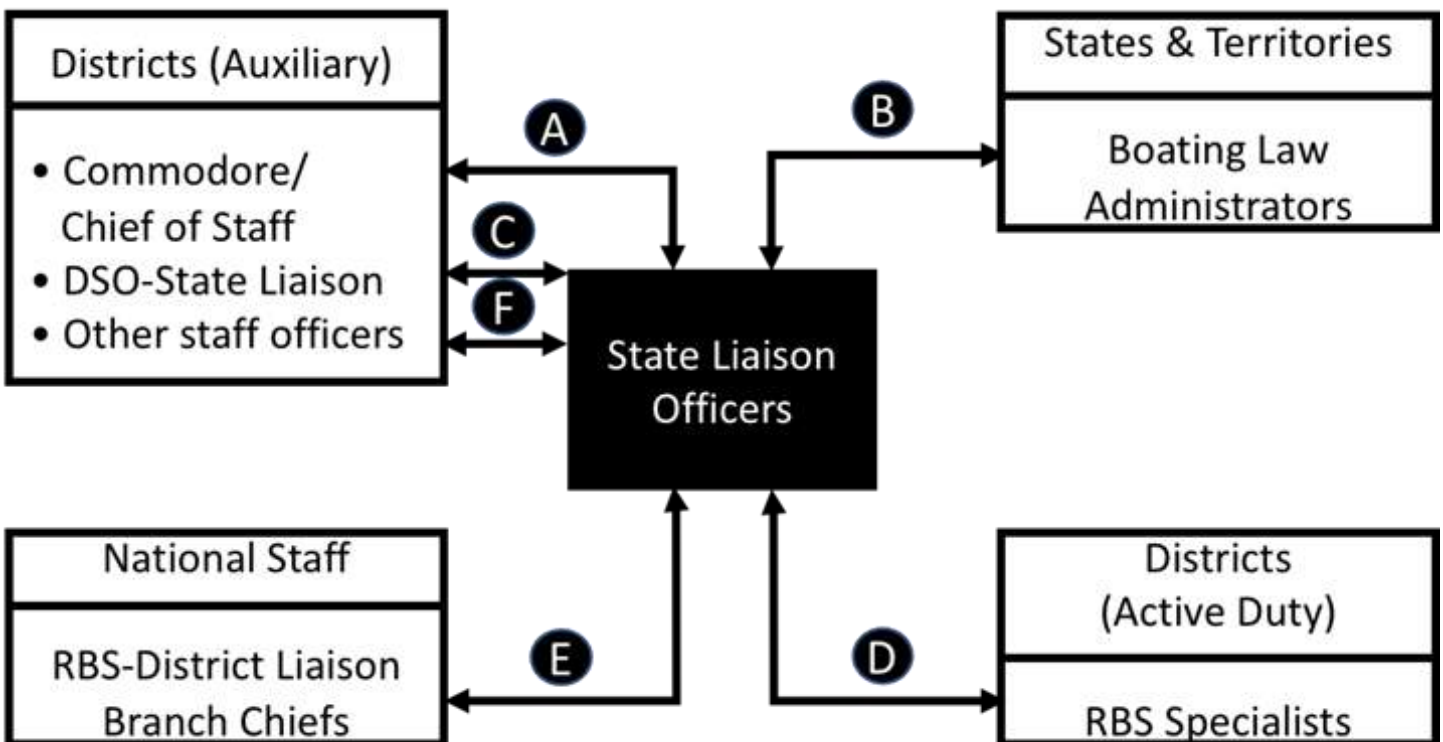
The Critical Link in RBS: Role of the State Liaison Officer

By Richard Young, Division Chief, RBS Outreach District Liaison

If there is one word that emphasizes the role of the Auxiliary State Liaison Officer (SLO) it has to be relationships. The Auxiliary established the SLO positions with the realization that individual states, the District of Columbia, and various territories each have their own recreational boating safety regulations supported by their own organizations, yet the U.S. Coast Guard has boating safety as a key mission. Moreover, Coast Guard districts and state boundaries do overlap with some districts covering multiple states and some states split between districts. In accordance with United States Code, State Liaison Officers are responsible for communicating how the state, the U.S. Coast Guard and the Auxiliary may combine their respective assets to significantly enhance RBS mission implementation.

The SLO has many roles, but perhaps the focus can be summed up as keeping the Auxiliary informed of the initiatives with the respective jurisdictions and keeping those jurisdictions informed of the activities of the Auxiliary, not the least of which covers public education, vessel examinations, and marine program visitations. Note that these communications not only have bidirectional flows, but it is also useful to understand that there may be others who may need to be informed of the discussions. Therefore, Figure 1 is a useful schematic for visualizing the position of the SLO and the individuals and organizations with whom they may interface. District Commodore (DCO). The DCO (A) is key because that is the source of the SLO's appointment, a selection process done in concert with the Boating Law Administrator and the RBS Division Chief - District Liaison. Ideally the DCO will also conduct the SLO's annual performance review. DCOs are also encouraged to engage the SLO in the annual planning meetings.

Boating Law Administrator (BLA). Each state has a BLA (B) who is usually a senior member of state law enforcement or a civilian employed by the state. Charged with ensuring that their jurisdiction maintains a safe and



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Georgia Governor Brian Kemp proclaims Georgia Safe Boating Week and recognizes the efforts of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the US Coast Guard Auxiliary and US Power Squadrons for their work to spread the message of safe boating and wearing life jackets. Pictured (L to R) Walter Rabon, Director Administrative Services DNR; DNR Commissioner Mark Williams; DNR Representatives: Mark Puig, Garrett Pownall, Wanda Roberts; US Coast Guard Auxiliary Representatives: Nan Ellen Fuller, Dave Fuller, Chuck Kelemen, Charles Jeffery; US Power Squadrons Atlanta Representatives: Barbara Tyson, Rhodes Lee. (Pre-COVID photo courtesy of Georgia Office of the Governor)

enjoyable boating environment, the BLA is involved in crafting and enforcing the state’s boating laws, maintaining boating education and overseeing training standards. The SLOs should endeavor to keep abreast of new regulatory initiatives and how these might impact USCG activities and programs. Finally, the SLO should try to keep the BLAs supplied with Auxiliary literature, posters and videos. Joint state-Auxiliary participation at such venues as boat shows and other marine events is highly encouraged.

District Staff Officer – State Liaison (DSO-SL). Responsible for administering a district’s State Liaison Program, the DSO-SL (C) assists the DCO when new SLO appointments are to be made and provide input to the SLO’s annual performance appraisal. Not all districts have a DSO-SL, but they are commonly found when a district covers multiple states.

Recreational Boating Safety Specialist (RBSS). A civilian employee of the Coast Guard District, the RBSS (D) will often support multiple states and must often rely on the SLO’s expertise for carrying out the respective state mission goals. The RBSS needs to develop close contact with the Auxiliary.

RBS Outreach District Liaison Branch Chief (RBS-BC). Organized into four regions, the RBS-BC’s (E)

role is to mentor the SLOs and DSO-SLs in the performance of their duties; solicit, compile and analyze quarterly reports; and conduct workshops and additional training as needed. The RBS-BC is the primary link between the SLO and should be considered an important resource when access to the RBS Outreach staff is required.

Other District Staff Officers. With RBS being a key mission of the Auxiliary relationships with other DSOs (F) including those responsible for vessel examinations, public education and program visits cannot be overstated.

SLO Requirements

The ideal SLO will be well-versed in boating within the state as well as the initiatives and priorities of the USCG and the USCG Auxiliary. Second, the SLO must be an ambassador for the USCG and the USCG Auxiliary who adheres to their strict rules of conduct and dress code; and possess an overall working knowledge of the Auxiliary and its missions. In short, the SLO must be proactive in both building and maintaining relationships among those individuals and organizations having a stake in recreational boating safety.

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National Safe Boating Week 2021 Set for May 22 thru 28

By Sydney Hay, BC-BRE

The official start of National Safe Boating Week (NSBW) is Saturday, May 22, but the day prior, “Wear Your Life Jacket to Work Day,” seems to garner much of the attention. No matter where Auxiliarists and other boaters find themselves working that day, it is a great time to kick off the week by emphasizing that safe boaters are always prepared to “Wear It!”

Now is the time to begin planning both for a virtual NSBW campaign at the flotilla, division and district levels but also “going live” if COVID restrictions are lifted. The Auxiliary needs to maximize outreach through the use of social media and asking trusted community partners nationwide to spread the word about boating safety.

Recently, Diane Riggan, Branch Chief in the A-Directorate, held a virtual meeting with Auxiliary Public Affairs and Publications professionals across the country and offered a myriad of ideas even if one’s District is still in COVID shutdown come May.

“In 2021, there is a lot to talk about,” she told the group. “For starters, boating safety classes taught remotely or in person, vessel exams under safe conditions, program visits.”

She then asked a rhetorical question, “Have we finished telling our story?”

Clearly, the boating safety message of the Coast Guard Auxiliary continues to be vitally important, perhaps more so now than ever with the increase in new boat owners attributed to COVID lockdowns. The National A-Directorate reminds Auxiliarists to use command messages when writing news releases, doing interviews or posting to social media:

- *Always wear your lifejacket**
- *File a float plan before you go**
- *Take a boating safety class**

- *Never boat under the influence**
- *Have a vessel safety exam annually**
- *Know how to use a marine radio**
- *Carry a water-activated EPIRB**
- *Use an engine cut-off switch lanyard**

Diane concluded, “Auxiliarists are energetic, enthusiastic and creative. Don’t reinvent the wheel. The 2021 Resource Kit from the National Safe Boating Council has everything you need to have an effective NSBW campaign.”

Free resources are available at www.safeboatingcampaign.com.

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