

KEVO'S BOATING TIPS & MORE

BY
KEVIN
O'LEARY



National Boating Safety Week: May 20-26

With the exception of January, our yacht club goes out once per month on a "raftout." Usually, like most safety-minded yacht/boat clubs, we invite the US Coast Guard Auxiliary (CGA) or the US Power Squadron (USPS) to meet us at the raftout to do our yearly Vessel Safety Check. We like to do this early in the season to make sure member boats are in ship shape for the long Northern California boating season. Also, early in the season we tend to choose vehicle-accessible locations where the CGA or USPS can get to us without any fuss.

So Admiral Susan, Uncle Bob (the boat dog) and I were with the club on our vessel *Her Way* at Village West Marina the weekend of March 10. My wife and I (think and hope) we run a tight ship and always look forward to getting our yearly safety sticker, which we proudly display in a portside window of our vessel.

Mr. Mike Lauro of the USCGA was our vessel examiner that day. When I asked him if he could check our vessel next, he looked at me and said: "I know who you are!" with a sly grin on his face. I didn't know what he meant, but I thought: Holy smokes, this guy is going to show me who's in charge. So I scrambled back to the boat to prepare for the test. I had everything in order except my visual distress signals (flares). I forgot where I put the darn things! Dang, he's coming down the dock! I knew they were up on the bridge somewhere and lifted up every cushion in sight. I found them under the last of five cushions just as Mike arrived. Then it dawned on me that one of the primary purposes of getting a Vessel Safety Check is to remember where all of your important safety gear is after the winter season. I tell this to my clients at Pacific Powerboating all the time. (You do know where *your* flares are, don't you?)

Boat Smart from the Start

Getting a Vessel Safety Check means boating smart from the start. (Now there's a catchy slogan!) It's a known fact that safe boats do save lives. For recreational boaters operating any size or type of vessel, safety should be an all-important part of the boating experience. In addition to wearing a life vest, completing a (written) boating safety course and in many cases engaging in onboard powerboat instruction (hint, hint), getting an annual Vessel Safety Check is the best way to "Boat smart from the start."

A Vessel Safety Check is a public service intended to serve as prevention through education. It is also intended to help recreational boaters gain a healthy respect for the boating/marine environment. The boater will receive



Kevo admiring his 2007 VSC sticker.

a copy of the safety check to keep onboard as well as a sticker to be placed on a portside window. In addition, the CGA/USPS examiner will discuss upgrading safety equipment and suggest additional safety items not required but DEFINITELY helpful in some situations (like a VHF radio).

Depending on the size of the vessel, a VSC usually takes between 15 to 30 minutes. It is totally voluntary. It is not a boarding or law enforcement action and there are no penalties or citations ever given as a result. The decal does not exempt the boater from being boarded by law enforcement, but it does indicate to anyone boarding your vessel that you are a responsible boater and have taken steps to keep you, your crew and guests as safe as possible on the water. Trust me: In these days of post 9/11, first impressions are very important when being boarded.

Safety Check Checklist

A typical Vessel Safety Check will focus on the following agenda. To get detailed information on each of these items and to find out more about VSC, visit www.safetyseal.net.

- Display of Numbers or Documentation
- Personal Flotation Devices
- Visual Distress Signals
- Fire Extinguishers
- Engine Backfire Flame Control
- Sound Producing Devices
- Navigation/Anchor Lights
- Pollution Placard
- MARPOL Trash Placard
- Marine Sanitation Devices
- Navigation Rules
- State and/or Local Requirements
- Overall Vessel Condition
- Deck free of hazards and clean bilge
- Safe Electrical and Fuel Systems
- Safe Galley and Heating Systems

So it turns out my perceived nemesis, Mr. Mike Lauro of the CGA, is nothing of the sort. He was very courteous, cheerful and professional. *Her*



Mike Lauro, left, of USCGA issuing the VSC sticker and documentation to two happy boaters.

Way passed the test. Mike has been a member of the USCGA for the last eight years. He has done more than 7,500 VSCs in that time and it looks like he will surpass 8,200 by the end of 2007. His goal is to get to 10,000 VSCs! His travels sometimes take him 30 to 50 miles from home sometimes to do just one check. During the spring and summer months you can find Mike at any number of launch ramps, marinas or yacht clubs doing VSCs.

So the next time you see a USCGA or US Power Squadron VSC examiner on the docks, at the yacht club or at the launch ramp, remember that these folks are volunteering their valuable time to help keep the rest of us safe on the water. Take the time to say hello, tell them what kind of boat you have and shake their hand. Better still, ask for a Vessel Safety Check. Trust me, you'll be glad you did.

Mike's goal in contributing to this article was to help me get my arms around what National Boating Safety Week is all about and to get the word out to the recreational boating community in Nor Cal to get a VSC in the month of May. He insists on citing the efforts of the entire "support staff" and the support of his wife. However, on behalf of all boaters in Northern California, I'd like to thank Mr. Mike Lauro, DSO-VE-District Staff officer for Vessel Exams, for all of the great work he and his team do for us boaters. Now that's a happy ending. HA!!!

As always, feedback is appreciated. I can be reached at 925/890-8428 or kevo@yachtsmanmagazine.com.

Be safe & happy boating! ➤
