

Ship Report Transcript

Wednesday, May 15, 2024

By Joanne Rideout

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It's time for the Ship Report the show about all things maritime. I'm Joanne Rideout. It's Wednesday, May 15th, 20, 24. In the ancient Roman calendar, today would be the Ides of May.

Well, today I wanted to talk with you about something that's been on my mind with regard to the increasingly nice weather we are having, and I hope that will continue to have going forward this spring and summer.

Because I have a big emphasis on safety, on this show, I wanted to talk a little water safety with you today, but in a slightly different way than I usually do. I'm sure by now you've heard it all before, either from me or someone else. I know I've said it a lot.

The water's cold. The currents are strong. The ocean can sweep you off your feet, even in very shallow water. And a rip current can drag you out to sea in a heartbeat. And on and on. So I think some people are tempted to sort of turn a deaf ear to that because they want to have fun and they don't think safety can be a part of that.

So I don't want to focus on all of that right now, partly because it's like maybe beating a drum that I've beaten before here on the show and a lot of other people are doing that, too, like the National Weather Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other great resources that are all telling us to be careful in and on the water.

But mostly today I want to come at it from a different angle. One that I've noticed over the years here. Today, I'd like to talk with you about the idea of normalizing safety.

Right now among a lot of folks who go to the beach or go out on the water – safety, now it's kind of for sissies. Something fun loving people don't bother with. And we all have had the experience sometime in our lives of thinking we are invincible and getting away with it, which can lead us to believe that we in our amazingness have some sort of quality that protects us from danger when all it really was was some great luck.

What I want is for people to change how they think and realize that safety is actually cool. Safety awareness shows that you are smart and savvy and that you get where you are. This might save your life and also the life of someone you love as well.

Now, normalizing safety is not a new concept. And if you look at people in the maritime industry, the professionals or even savvy recreational boaters or people who are in the water a lot at the beach safely like surfers, people who know their stuff.

Sure, they take risks, some for fun, some inherent in their jobs, but only after they've put in place common sense safety measures to protect them. If something goes wrong. And this is not negotiable for these folks, they just do it. It's second nature.

For instance, in my years of observing people locally in the maritime industry, here I see the redundant systems and high quality safety gear that mariners insist on. And these things can mean the difference between life and death in a crunch. Things on vessels like two sets of controls in case one breaks multiple ways to determine your position of one navigation method fails. Extra fuel. Extra food. Extra dry clothes. Extra everything. Backups for just about anything you can think of so you can save your own bacon in a crisis. Or at least make it easier for people to help you if you can't.

People who go out on the water generally take measures as a matter of course, in case of a problem or an accident or yes, a catastrophe. Things can happen so fast - these problems relating to the water often without warning and they can be deadly. Jeez, simply falling in the water around here can be deadly. So a nice day can turn tragic on a dime. And that is just where we live. Smart folks don't obsess about it. They don't whine about it. They prepare. They don't waste time worrying about how they look because they know what's at stake.

So professional mariners, the pros like bar pilots, deckhands, boat operators and other folks working on deck on vessels, they wear things like PFDs (lifejackets ), float coats (which is a PFD that looks like a coat and can keep you warm in the water.) Position indicator beacon devices called EPIRBs, lights, whistles, safety harnesses, lifelines.

They would no sooner go out without these things and they would go out without their clothes on. And you know, it's too cold most of the time to do that here. Even if you wanted to.

And to support that notion when something goes wrong and there's a rescue or recovery operation and there is an investigation, what does the Coast Guard looking for? What didn't you do to protect yourself? What could you have done to save yourself? They do this to warn others because it makes their job that much harder if you were in the water with no safety gear - and they're looking for ways for people to learn from others' mistakes.

Boating magazines that I read, a lot of them have a "Learn from my Errors" story as a regular feature where someone will write about a problem they encountered at sea in their boat when something went wrong and what they did right and what they didn't. These are, of course, written by people who survive a mishap. There are plenty who don't.

And the US Coast Guard is quick to praise and celebrate the crews of vessels, for instance, that they rescue, who have done their due diligence and safety prep, and they talk about how it pays off in a safe rescue when something goes wrong.

They had an EPIRB, they had life jackets, survival suits, VHF radio. All of that meant that the Coast Guard could find them fast and they could afford to wait because they had the gear.

I've done a lot of racing sailing here on the river in past years on fast phone boats where you just have a great time knocking around out there in all kinds of weather. But the one thing that is mandatory and you can't just go out on a boat without it is a PFD or lifejacket.

If you don't have one and you don't wear it. You can't go. Simple as that. No arguing. Because other than them wanting you to be safe, if you fall overboard, you immediately become a huge nightmare and a dire emergency for the other people on that boat.

They will have a hard enough time getting you back on the boat if you fall in, without you adding in the fact that you have nothing to hold you up in the water. So they just won't allow it. End of story. that's common sense and that's normalizing safety. You want to play, you have to take reasonable care of yourself. If not for yourself, then for the sake of others around you.

After all, the boating environment here is the same environment, with the same overall risks, whether you are on a boat or on the beach. So if safety is good enough for smart boaters and professional mariners. It ought to be good enough for you. So that's my message.

Whether you are at the beach or on a boat, look out for yourself. Be an asset, not a liability. If you have kids out there in the water, protect them with good gear. Do that for them, if not for you, and do all you can to make sure that if something goes wrong and we see it here every year during nice weather, at least you have done all you can.

But also remember that regardless of what I'm saying here, which might sound like overkill to some folks, that whether you are prepared or not, the Coast Guard, Good Samaritans, and other mariners will do their best to help you out if you get in trouble on or in the water.

You'll just have such an easier time of it and a much higher likelihood of surviving a problem, if you just do a few simple things to protect yourself.

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