



# Safety Advisory Notice

01/2014



# Foreword

It is a striking fact that the majority of watersport activities are safe, but what is also clear is that accidents can and do happen. As a result, what should have been a fun, rewarding and enjoyable day out can end in tragic circumstances and inconsolable grief for family, friends and loved ones.

The question then is not just what went wrong but could the accident have been prevented in the first place. Surprisingly the answer is 'yes' more often than you might think.

The RYA recognises that it is not always easy to identify hazards and how we might be vulnerable to events that might go badly wrong. That is why there is great merit in learning lessons from accidents and the experience of others if it gets us thinking about our own attitudes and behaviour when out on the water.

The RYA Safety Advisory Notice brings together critical safety issues, including those that have arisen from incidents in the past year, into a single digest and is supplemented by considerable safety advice available from the RYA.

The RYA's key safety messages; look after yourself, have a plan, keep in touch and know your limits underpin the RYA ethos of self-reliance and responsibility for safety on board. We hope that everyone who reads the RYA Safety Advisory Notice will be encouraged to think about their own actions and abilities. The best bit of safety equipment you have is your brain and not a gadget!

Whatever the severity of accidents, they are always regrettable, frequently costly and as we know sometimes disastrous. Safe behaviour and practice ultimately protects life and equipment and is vital for the enjoyment of leisure boating at every level that it takes place.

## Safe boating.

# Critical safety issues

## Kill cords

### **The RYA safety advice is:**

**Always use a kill cord and ensure that it is attached to the driver of the boat.**

The kill cord serves only one purpose, to stop the engine when the driver moves away from the controls. To ensure that tragic accidents are not repeated it is essential that all owners and drivers of open powerboats, PWCs and RIBs ensure their boat is fitted with a kill switch and kill cord and that it is correctly used.

Always attach the cord securely to the driver, ideally before the engine is started, but certainly before the boat is put in gear where safe to do so. Stop the engine before transferring the kill cord to another driver.

On a powerboat the kill cord should be attached securely around the thigh and on a Personal Watercraft it should be attached to the buoyancy aid.

The RYA recommends when replacing a kill cord that you buy the manufacturer's genuine replacement item.

The kill cord was brought into sharp relief by the Camel Estuary tragedy in May 2013 which resulted in the death of a man and his eight-year-old daughter when a family of two adults and four children were ejected into the water while manoeuvring the boat at speed. The MAIB Safety Bulletin 1/2013 concluded that the 8m-long rigid-hulled inflatable boat was fitted with a kill cord but it was not attached to the driver at the time the accident happened.

**More information on the correct wear of a kill cord can be found on the RYA website.**

# Alcohol

## **The RYA safety advice is: Alcohol and boating do not mix.**

Alcohol will impair your coordination and your ability to think clearly, particularly in an emergency situation. It influences your behaviour and affects your judgement.

The RYA does not condone the drinking of alcohol whilst in charge of a vessel and encourages all boaters to act responsibly in this regard.

Care should also be taken when at anchor, transferring to and from a tender or when walking to and from a boat along a pontoon.

**More information on alcohol and boating can be found on the RYA website.**



# Carbon monoxide poisoning

## **The RYA safety advice is:**

**Carbon monoxide poisoning is an ever present risk where any appliance or device that burns carbon based fuel is used.**

You cannot see, feel, smell or taste carbon monoxide (CO), but it is highly poisonous which is why it is often called the silent killer.

CO in excessive quantities is produced by incomplete burning of carbon-based fuels, including gas, oil, wood and coal. When CO enters the body, it replaces the oxygen in the bloodstream and prevents the blood from bringing oxygen to the heart, brain, body tissues, and organs.

Levels that do not kill can cause serious harm to health if breathed in over a long period. In extreme cases paralysis and brain damage can be caused as a result of prolonged exposure to CO. Increasing public understanding of the risks of CO poisoning and taking sensible precautions could dramatically reduce this risk.

Common symptoms include headache, tiredness and being sick. The greater the amount of CO the more severe the symptoms will get leading to weakness, loss of balance and memory. Extreme levels may well cause collapse, unconsciousness and death.

Flue gases from solid fuel stoves, more common to canal boats, can have up to 100 times the concentrations of CO found in gas burners. Smouldering embers and charcoal give off particularly high levels of CO so never bring a cooling barbecue into an enclosed space for any residual warmth. Cookers and leaking exhausts can give off high levels of CO.

It goes without saying that any appliance that burns carbon based fuels should be properly installed and serviced by someone who is competent. They will be able to ensure that there is an adequate air supply to run the appliance and that flues are properly installed where they are fitted. It is also worth buying an audible CO alarm that will immediately alert you to any carbon monoxide in your boat.

**More information on the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning can be found on the [RYA website](#).**

# Prop guards

## **The RYA safety advice is: Think carefully before fitting a prop guard.**

The decision on whether or not to fit a prop guard should be made only once a full appraisal of the pros and cons of prop guards has been carried out, given the intended use of the boat.

You should fit a prop guard only once you have made a full assessment of the impact it will have on your vessel and the operation for which you intend to use it. It is not a panacea as many would believe.

The most effective way of avoiding prop strike injuries is by avoiding a person being in the water anywhere near a moving propeller in the first place. Preventative measures such as wearing a kill cord remain the primary safety mechanism.

There is no substitute for the safe operation of a power boat and in the event that a prop guard is fitted it should be regarded as nothing more than a “last resort” in case all other preventative measures have failed.

**More information on prop guards can be found on the RYA website.**



# Buoyancy aids and lifejackets

## The RYA safety advice is:

**Wear a lifejacket or buoyancy aid unless you are sure you don't need to.**

You can base this decision on factors such as weather conditions, the type of activity you are doing and your level of experience. If you are a beginner or still relatively inexperienced, making these judgements is often not that easy, so if this is the case, wear one at all times.

Selection of the correct personal buoyancy is critical and needs to be appropriate to the activity. Buoyancy aids are simply that – an aid to buoyancy that generally relies on help being close to hand. It assumes that the wearer is able to help themselves to some degree by swimming to safety or by keeping themselves afloat while assistance arrives if required.

Buoyancy aids are suitable for PWC, dinghies, windsurfing and generally for activities where the wearer might reasonably expect to end up in the water.

A lifejacket is intended for use where a high standard of performance is required. It will turn an unconscious person into a safe position and requires no subsequent action by the user to maintain this position. You should consider whether an automatic lifejacket or manual inflate lifejacket, both with sprayhood, light and whistle, is appropriate to the boating activity you are undertaking. Ideally you should fit or buy a lifejacket that is fitted with crotch straps; these will stop the lifejacket riding up over your head.

Lifejackets are suitable when on a powerboat or RIB, when going ashore in a yacht tender, on a sailing yacht or motor cruiser and generally where you do not expect to enter the water. Where possible test your lifejacket in a controlled environment to check that it will work for you.

Remember that inflatable lifejackets and buoyancy aids are useless unless they work. They must be checked regularly and serviced in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

**More information on buoyancy aids and lifejackets can be found on the RYA website.**

# EPIRB and PLB registration

## The RYA safety advice is:

**Register your 406 megahertz beacon now – it is a legal requirement and it could speed up your rescue and even save your life.**

EPIRB (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons) and PLB (Personal Locator Beacons) are a fast effective way of distress alerting for any kind of vessel. They enable the SAR (Search and Rescue) agencies to quickly and accurately identify and locate casualties so that they can make a successful rescue.

There are three critical points to stress on the proper registration of any beacon:

- The owner's details and emergency contact information must be current.
- The primary and, where the facility exists, alternate 24hr emergency contacts must know what the beacon owner is doing and where he/she is likely to be. It is useful if they know what boat the beacon owner is on, what race they are taking part in and race organiser contact details, or the passage they are undertaking if cruising. There is no point in simply nominating a legal next of kin who may not be close to you and who does not know this information.
- It is the beacon owner's personal responsibility to ensure that the beacon registration details are kept up to date, not anyone else's.

Put quite simply a properly registered EPIRB or PLB could mean the difference between surviving an incident at sea and losing your life.

Registration is free and simple so act now and register on line with the UK Beacon Registry at [Gov.UK/406beacon](http://Gov.UK/406beacon).

# The RYA has a built an enviable reputation as the national body for all forms of recreational and competitive boating

It represents dinghy and yacht racing, motor and sail cruising, RIBs and sportsboats, powerboat racing, windsurfing, inland cruising and personal watercraft. The RYA manages the British sailing team which has enjoyed considerable world class and Olympic success.



We set and maintain an international standard for recreational boat training. RYA training courses form the basis for the small craft training of lifeboat crews, police officers and the Royal Navy, small commercial craft and are also adopted as a template for training in many other countries throughout the world. Approximately a quarter of a million people take an RYA course each year.

The RYA ethos is one of proficiency and self-reliance which is by and large shared by the vast majority of boaters. It is learned through our world class training and is supported by our publications, comprehensive guidance and definitive safety advice.

Overall the UK's boating community, approximately 2.8m people, has a high standard of safety on the water compared to other boating nations and we want to keep it that way.

Our safety advice is aimed at helping boaters to avoid trouble in the first place by getting them to think about themselves, their boat and their crew rather than simply prescribing a list of what equipment to carry when things go wrong.



# Your safety on the water

01

## Look after yourself:

you are your best piece of safety equipment

02

## Have a plan:

be prepared

03

## Keep in touch:

have a suitable means of communication  
on board

04

## Know your limits:

don't go beyond your experience and ability

Don't ruin a good  
day on the water

Be safe:  
Enjoy more



The Royal Yachting Association  
RYA House  
Ensign Way  
Hamble  
SO31 4YA

**02380 604100**  
**info@rya.org.uk**  
**www.rya.org.uk**

