



Safety Advisory Notice

Third Edition

January 2016



Foreword

Welcome to the 2016 RYA Safety Advisory Notice.

The RYA is recognised as the national body for all forms of recreational and competitive boating. We represent dinghy and yacht racing, motor and sail cruising, RIBs and sportsboats, powerboat racing, windsurfing, inland cruising and personal watercraft.

We set and maintain an international standard for recreational and small commercial boat training. Our training courses form the basis for the small craft training of lifeboat crews, police officers and the Royal Navy and are also adopted by many other countries throughout the world.

Our ethos is one of proficiency and self-sufficiency learned through world-class training supported by our publications, along with the comprehensive guidance and safety advice that's readily available at rya.org.uk

Rather than simply prescribing a list of what to carry, or what to do when things go wrong, we aim to help boaters avoid trouble in the first place by thinking about what we do and how we do it.

Our Safety Advisory Notice, now in its third edition, focuses on safety issues from the past year where lessons can be learned. Underpinned by safety advice on our website, it highlights concerns that we believe require particular attention.

We hope that identifying the causes of incidents and accidents and how they might have been prevented will encourage us all to think about our own actions in a different light and above all help to make better decisions both before setting off and when out on the water.

Our purpose is to promote and protect safe, successful and rewarding British boating; a safe mind set and adopting good practice are vital if this is to be achieved.



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

Critical safety issues

Keep a good lookout

The RYA safety advice is:

It is essential to maintain a proper lookout at all times; never assume that you have been seen by other vessels, or that they will take avoiding action.

Rule 5 of The International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (Colregs) states that 'every vessel shall at all times maintain a proper lookout by sight and hearing as well as by all available means appropriate in the prevailing circumstances and conditions so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and of the risk of collision.'

This places considerable responsibility on a skipper and relies heavily on common sense and good seamanship. A proper lookout is not specifically a seaman alone on the bow in oilskins peering into the gloom, but rather the continuous collection of enough information needed to comply with the steering and sailing rules, and to avoid a collision. Clearly, where there is good all-around visibility and where night vision is unaffected, the helm may well both steer and keep a lookout.

It's important that we are all aware when the information available is incomplete. If it is, then either the lookout effort must be increased (for example, by using electronic aids such as radar) or the need for information must be reduced (for example, by slowing speed in poor visibility).

Either way, the gap that sometimes opens between the amount of information collected and the amount needed is a potential cause for collision. Too often vessels collide because the information gap has been ignored or has been filled with assumptions.

It's also important to expect the unexpected. For example, stand up paddle-boarding is great fun and becoming increasingly popular, but with it comes the risk of a SUP being paddled intentionally or unintentionally across places where larger, faster craft travel. This can present a substantial hazard to navigation or safety. The same applies to swimmers who may for any number of reasons appear unexpectedly outside of designated swimming areas. Both instances illustrate the need for us all to keep a good lookout for each other.

The purpose of a lookout is simple. The navigation rules are intended to prevent collisions and avoid damage and injury – and a lookout provides the information needed to comply with the rules. We should all keep this uppermost in our minds. The lack of a proper lookout is a contributory factor in a large number of collision situations.

Check the size and fit of personal flotation devices

The RYA safety advice is:

When you go out on the water water a lifejacket or buoyancy aid is an invaluable bit of kit; worn correctly they could save your life

Personal flotation devices can broadly be divided into two classes:

- Lifejackets that keep your face clear of the water regardless of physical conditions, and
- Buoyancy aids that aid swimming and provide some buoyancy to assist you in reasonably sheltered waters

The two classes provide different levels of buoyancy, performance and use. This enables lifejackets and buoyancy aids to be designed to meet the diverse needs of everyone participating in leisure activities on the water, but it can lead to a confusing choice of designs and styles.

Before buying a lifejacket or buoyancy aid, the first thing you must do is to think about exactly what activity you intend to use it for. Buoyancy aids are great when participating in inland and inshore activities such as personal watercraft, dinghy sailing, wind surfing, kayaking, water skiing and stand up paddle-boarding that require plenty of movement or where you can expect to be in the water at some point. Lifejackets are suitable when on a powerboat or RIB, when going ashore in a tender, offshore on a sailing yacht or motor cruiser and generally where you do not expect to end up in the water.

Once you've decided what is best for you, you need to ensure that it fits properly. Buoyancy aids and lifejackets come in a broad range of sizes, so make sure that what you choose is the correct size and fit in addition to providing the correct level of buoyancy for your activity.

Thirdly, lifejackets and buoyancy aids must also be easy to don and easy to adjust, so fastenings should be few and simple. Think about any personal limitations or characteristics that might hinder the equipment's use and try it on, not only in the chandlery but also with the clothing you intend to wear it with.

Many sailors and certainly the majority of high performance sailors now choose to wear a rash vest over the top of their buoyancy aid once it is on. This is a significant help in smoothing bumps and preventing tangles and possibly entrapment. However, rash vests should never be worn over an inflating lifejacket.

Always wear appropriate footwear

The RYA safety advice is:

Keep your feet protected from the elements; proper boating footwear allows you to move around without slipping or stubbing your toes at a critical moment

Footwear when doing any form of boating activity is important. Deck shoes, sea boots, aqua socks, dinghy and hiking boots, to name just a few, should all provide better traction on wet and slippery surfaces and will help to protect your feet from harm.

If you think about it, there are places on any boat where hand holds and guard rails are either missing or too far away to make any difference; there are also plenty of objects to stub or catch your toes on. And it's not just on a boat where you may need to be careful, launching ramps and slipways can be risky at low water and you never know what's under the surface if you are jumping in when coming ashore. At times like these, the only thing standing between you and possible injury may literally be what you are wearing on your feet.

The idea behind the traditional sole pattern found on boating footwear was originally invented by American sailor Paul Sperry after he slipped on deck and fell overboard. The pattern and grooves are designed to create a tread that dispels water; this provides improved traction to grip slippery surfaces in wet conditions and does not pick up grit which may cause damage to gelcoat surfaces.

It's important to think about what is appropriate for your activity. If you're likely to get wet then something that does not hold water or drains quickly is the best choice. Something that is waterproof and will keep your feet dry and warm is better offshore, but think about being able to get sea boots off quickly if you need to; they are a hindrance when full of water. Whatever you select, it's important that it fits correctly. Deck shoes must be snug when worn without socks and lace length should be kept short to reduce snagging and trips.

The wrong choice of footwear can take the fun out of any boating activity. Your safety is important and should be uppermost in your mind when selecting footwear for water activities. Boating footwear should be also comfortable enough to wear on the feet at all times if it is to provide an assurance of safety and to do away with the risky habit of walking barefoot on decks. For reasons which we hope are obvious, leave the flip-flops ashore.

Reflecting on radar reflectors

The RYA safety advice is:

If it is possible to fit a radar reflector on your boat you should do so, but you should also be aware of the limitations of the passive radar reflectors currently available

SOLAS regulations require all vessels under 150 Gross Tonnage to have a radar reflector if possible.

Over the past few years there have been several trials carried out to determine just how effectively radar reflectors for recreational boats perform in the two bands of marine radar, the X band (9GHz) and the S band (3GHz). All seemingly conclude that whatever their manufacturers might claim, some designs are little better than no reflector at all and even the most popular do not always come up to expectations. This and the fact that that even the best recreational reflector is affected by positioning, orientation, and angle of heel, means that in certain circumstances you may still not be readily visible on radar.

Because of the limitations of passive reflectors, active radar reflectors or radar target enhancers are becoming popular where power consumption is not a problem. These return an amplified response when triggered by incoming radar signals and greatly increase the chances of detection. But they are expensive and it is worth giving considerable thought to the type of boating you do before investing in one.

If you go boating mostly by day and in reasonable shelter, then on the principle that something is better than nothing, a passive reflector is probably all you need. If however you go further offshore, sail at night and cross shipping lanes then a radar target enhancer may well be worth the investment. However, as they become more common you need to be disciplined enough to turn them off when they are clearly not required and we would also recommend having a passive reflector available for those occasions when the power fails.

Many commercial vessels now have AIS installed. If you fit an AIS receiver you can obtain the name, position, course, speed and MMSI of vessels in range. This may be of equal value for avoiding a collision and if really necessary contacting them by VHF radio.

A final word – we believe that all of us in small boats should assume at all times, even if our boats are equipped with both radar reflectors and AIS, that ships have not seen us and we should all navigate with caution.

Photo credit Paul Glatzel

Correct use of VHF

The RYA safety advice is:

A means of calling for help in the event of an emergency is essential for all boaters, yet its misuse can be a cause of interference and danger at sea

Although VHF makes a vital contribution to safety, its misuse can cause interference and can itself become a danger. We should all remember that VHF radios should only be used in accordance with the International Telecommunications Union Radio Regulations. These specifically advise that:

- Channel 16 may only be used for distress, urgency and very brief safety communications and for calling to establish other communications which should then be concluded on a suitable working channel;
- The only messages permitted on VHF channels allocated to port operations or ship movement services such as VTS, are those relating to operational handling, the movement and safety of ships and to the safety of persons;
- All signals must be preceded by identification, for example the vessel's name or call sign;
- Every VHF radio must be controlled by an operator holding a certificate issued or recognised by the station's licensing administration. Providing the radio set is so controlled, others besides the holder of the certificate may use the equipment.

Before transmitting, think about what you want to communicate. If necessary prepare a few notes as an aide memoire to get your message over as briefly as possible, in case you are interrupted. Listen before you transmit to make certain that the channel is not already in use and avoid:

- non-essential transmissions
- occupation of one particular channel under poor conditions
- transmitting without correct identification
- offensive language
- repetition of words and phrases unless specifically requested by the receiving station

When possible, use the lowest transmitter power necessary for satisfactory communication. Finally, make sure the press-to-talk switch is released and stow the hand set or a handheld radio so that it is not inadvertently set to transmit. If you have not heard anything for some time on a busy day it is worth checking that you are not still broadcasting.

Photo credit Standard Horizon

Always anchor safely

The RYA safety advice is:

Ensure that arrangements are adequate for maintaining your safety at anchor at all times

An anchored vessel is not underway, but as soon as its anchor leaves the bottom or drags then it is. You may therefore need to set an anchor watch to establish if your anchor is dragging, to warn others of your presence, or to ensure that you do not drift into danger.

Anchored vessels are dealt with by Rule 30 of the Colregs. It's essential that you exhibit the appropriate lights and shapes while at anchor and that appropriate sound signals are made in restricted visibility. By day an anchor ball must be displayed. By night, a vessel of less than 50m LOA must exhibit at least one all-round white light where it can best be seen.

Clearly the purpose of the anchor light is to enable you to be seen by others so that they can take appropriate action. The visibility ranges of lights specified in the Colregs are minima, not maxima, so make sure that your anchor light is bright enough to be seen.

A light at the top of the mast may conveniently double as a steaming light and a stern light on 'power-driven' vessels of less than 12m in length. However, is the top of a tall mast the best place to put an anchor light when the small craft that is bearing down on you is looking horizontally ahead?

Consider displaying it where others might be looking; if someone is trying to navigate near a harbour entrance this may not be far from head height, for example.

When at anchor you can also use lights to illuminate your deck. These days LED lights do not use much power and using additional lights all help to make you more visible. This may also assist an approaching vessel to determine how you are lying and in which direction your anchor warp or chain extends.

When choosing an anchorage and when at anchor, it is well worth thinking about:

- nature, size and characteristics of the anchorage
- prevailing weather, sea and current conditions
- traffic conditions and situations which might affect the safety of your boat
- communication requirements
- engine readiness

This will enable you to decide how best to monitor your position and what sort of watch you need to maintain while at anchor.

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