



Pop goes the Life Raft, swoosh goes the flare at the Safety at Sea Seminar
By Jean K. Levine

Forty people gathered along the dockside Tiki bar deck at Clearwater Yacht Club on Saturday December 15th to participate in the Safety at Sea seminar. Hosted by several area marine businesses this was a free seminar open to the public. Stormy weather was predicted but it turned out to be a sunny day with a few passing clouds and the wind blowing out of the south east at 15 knots. The wind made for some entertainment setting fires and shooting off flares. The event was designed as an overview discussing man (or mariner) over board recovery under both power and sail, small boat fires, abandon ship procedures, deployment of a life raft and flares consolidated into a two hour format. After a brief meet and greet period Master of Ceremonies Jeff Grossman of Antigua Marine Survey & Consulting set up the scenario. Captain Ron was underway on the SV Minnow from Clearwater to Key West on a calm evening. He then decided to BBQ steaks on the stern grill. After lighting the fire he hears Man over board. Dropping everything he proceeds to do the MOB recovery. Miles Curry Cruising chair for the Clearwater Yacht club and a USCG licensed Master explained the Williamson Turn for MOB recovery under power. The Williamson turn is a method in which course is maintained until both course and speed are logged, then the helm is turned 60 degrees to starboard until the new course is achieved, next the helm is turned hard to port thus bringing the vessel to a reciprocal course. This enables the vessel to retrace its course, returning to the starting point regardless of keeping sight of the victim. Gardener Lloyd from Flagship Sailing School of Clearwater discussed both the Figure eight and Quick stop method for boats under sail. The Figure eight only requires tacking so the boom never sweeps the deck, which may knock another person into the water. The downfall is sailing too far away from the victim to maneuver. The Quick stop allows you to circle back immediately by throwing the helm over and tacking without releasing the jib, in almost a heave to maneuver, the boat slows its speed, then gibes. You can now choose to approach the person in the water from up wind allowing you to drift towards the victim or approach from down wind depending on the sea state.

During the Man overboard discussion the fire on the BBQ had been blazing. Gary Gray of the USCG Auxiliary Clearwater demonstrated the discharge of a standard boat ABC fire extinguisher and explained the types of fire that it can be used on. A for Ash are fires burning solids like cloth, B for Boil are fires burning vapors of liquids like gasoline, C for Current fires that are electrical short circuits. A large chart on display described the number of extinguishers and their locations based on the size of the vessel required by USCG. In this case an ABC extinguisher that read full on the gauge with 2 lbs of dry chemical was able to put out the small BBQ fire. But on the SV Minnow we could not put out the fire and were forced to call May Day and abandon ship. A fiberglass boat on fire burns very hot and puts out an overwhelming amount of toxic smoke. Bob Fox, also a USCG licensed Master and offshore delivery skipper, demonstrated the May Day call. Speaking clearly he repeats May Day! May Day! May Day! This is the SV Minnow our position is Latitude X, Longitude Y, Fire, Fire, Fire, five people abandoning ship then repeats. An experienced offshore sailor Bob also carries "The Spot" a personal satellite tracking messenger. The unit retails for \$149.00 is waterproof and floats. It contains a GPS chip which determines your exact coordinates and sends your location to the emergency response center which contacts the USCG. The signal repeats every five minutes until

canceled. More information on “The Spot” is available through Bob Fox 727-460-6868. Meanwhile the crew grabs the abandon ship bag (a.k.a. Bug out Bag) and prepares the life raft. Since the SV Minnow’s out of control fire forced us to abandon ship we reviewed the contents of the bag separated into the following:

Communications: E.P.I.R.B, SAT phone and a small phone book with emergency contact numbers, VHF handheld stowed charged and ready in the bag, whistle, and air horn.

Navigation: GPS (leave your spare in the bag), Chart, Hand bearing compass, log book.

Emergency & Safety: Flares, 25 mm flare gun with 6 Red Meteor and 6 Parachute flare rounds, 2 Solas Flares, Signal mirror, Water Dye, Streamer Sea Rescue (40’ by 1.5’), Orange smoke flares, Cyalume florescent sticks, flashlight, spare batteries, basic first aide kit, seasick pills, personal Water maker. It is very important to include in a waterproof bag the Crew I.D. and cash because when you are rescued you do not know at what port you may end up. A deck of waterproof cards to keep spirits up should also be in the bag.

Additional items: Space blanket, large trash bags with duct tape and wet suits, these items can protect you against hypothermia. The wet suits add floatation to the bag and can protect you from the elements.

Now that we have our Bug Out Bag the painter of the life raft is tied off to a fixed object like the forward stanchion away from the fire, or for this demo the pool ladder. The life raft in its case was then deployed into the water. The motivated crew took about 10 seconds to pull the one hundred foot painter, and POP, the raft inflated. Jeff Grossman then demonstrated how to sit in the raft and six volunteers from the audience climbed into the inflated raft floating in the water. (See Photos) In case our burning boat fire and billowing smoke isn’t attracting attention, Jeff reviewed the various types of flares. Special permission was granted by the United States Coast Guard Sand Key Station to do a live fire exercise. The first flare fired was a standard 12 gauge round from a flare gun, which claims to burn for up to 7 seconds at 16,000 candela. What the crowd witnessed was about a 3 second burn, not very impressive. Next the 25 mm red meteor flare was fired; it shot up so high it went into a cloud and was not visible until it landed in the water in front of the dock. Now the wind direction is a factor in shooting off the 25 mm red parachute flare. It was fired at an upwind angle and flew over the crowd one thousand feet burning brightly for easily the 29 seconds on the Orion specifications. Now that was impressive. Luckily the south east wind blew it back over the water before it descended back to earth, which probably one reason that it is illegal to fire off flares with out specific permission and notification of the local police and the United States Coast Guard.

All of the flares, fire extinguishers and the life raft used in the demonstration were out of date and luckily were still operational.

In summary it is strongly recommended that you review your safety gear annually to make sure you have the best opportunity to survive an emergency. We used an example of a well prepared crew who did just one foolish thing to remind you of how easily this could happen to you. Make an emergency plan and practice a few different scenarios. (Examples: a fire on board, or dismasting). Plan to practice with the Crew, man (or mariner) over board recovery techniques, make sure everyone who may be at the helm knows what to do and can retrieve the victim, throw a cushion, shout and point, return and recover. Make a habit if sailing off shore of stowing the crew wallets in the abandon ship bag until you reach your destination, even more important make sure you can access the bag without going below.

If planning an offshore passage you may consider renting a life raft and E.P.I.R.B.(both are available through Boat US) if you do not own them. Do not forget to file a float plan with friends and close the loop when you arrive by calling and letting them know you are safe.

The group facilitating the Safety at Sea Seminar feel strongly about education of boating safety and are willing to repeat this seminar, or customize it for your local club, contact Jean Levine at Antigua Marine Survey and Consulting, 727-644-7496 for more information.