

# Tech Tips: Passenger On-Board Safety

*By Bill Whitney*

The summer activities at Homecoming in Rockland are some of the Society's cornerstone events. Gathering with our friends, racing, cruising, watching the kids, swapping yarns about our nautical triumphs ("sea stories" to those who don't know us, and "bald-faced lies" to those who do!). The activities in and around Rockland do a lot to bring us together and introduce the public to the Friendship Sloop Society. Talking with people on the floats and taking them for a sail during the races is a great way to have fun and show folks what Friendship sloops are and how they operate.

I'm not sure who came up with the idea of having the "crew call" after the skipper's meeting, but it is a fantastic way to meet new people. The people who answer the call come with a wide range of boating and sailing experience; from knowing little or nothing about boats, to being very experienced. Some are former Friendship owners, or people who have been sailing for years on other types of boats. But the bottom line is that anyone we have invited aboard doesn't know our specific boat, even other Friendship owners.

So, if we invite people to get underway with us, what is our responsibility? Maybe a better way to look at this is to rephrase the question and ask what our liability? Basically, as the operator or captain of a documented or undocumented vessel, we are liable for anything that happens on board, either at the pier or underway. Think about it! That's a big burden. We really should have some way to protect our volunteer passengers and ourselves.

One way to help ensure the safety of our passengers is to provide them with the information they need to protect themselves and the other people who may be aboard. It all starts with a safety brief. For instance where are the life jackets? What should I do if someone falls overboard? What if I fall overboard? Here is a representative briefing similar to the one I give the new crew, even those who have sailed with me previously.

1. Introduce them to yourself and the boat. Show them where to stow their gear and how to secure it so it doesn't fly about during maneuvers or when crossing the ferry's wake.
2. Explain how the marine head works and how not to plug it up! You can also offer them the adventure of using the ships bucket. I find that to be a good way to encourage people to use facilities ashore before departing.
3. Now ask if any of your passengers are non-swimmers or poor swimmers. If you have any it's a good time to show everyone where the life jackets are stowed, and how to put one on. Insisting that non-swimmers wear a life jacket is a good idea. Children under 12 must wear them. If they refuse I regrettably invite them and their parents ashore.
4. One of the greatest risks we face is a person overboard. I've had two incidents where over-exuberant neophytes nearly ended up in the drink! Now I appoint responsibilities to the crew in the case of a person-overboard event and brief everyone on sounding the alarm and getting one of the cockpit cushions or any type IV flotation device to the person in the water.
  - A. One person is assigned as the MOB spotter, and another as the alternate
  - B. Depending on crew skill, another person is assigned to sail handling
  - C. One person is assigned to break out the retrieval gear
  - D. I keep the helm and engine control responsibilities
  - E. Everyone else goes below (if there is anyone left!)
5. The last part of the safety brief is about on-board fires and location of fire extinguishers. Everyone has to know that sounding the alarm is the first critical step in any emergency. In the case of a fire I tell everyone to go forward while I try to deal with the problem.

The safety brief you provide to your crew should be what you think is appropriate. Obviously you don't want to scare anyone away, but I think we should all consider the safety of our passengers and try to give them the tools they may need if things go wrong on the water.