



## How to Avoid Common Boating Mistakes

### *Sea Tow Captains Offer Commonsense Tips for Staying Safe on the Water*

The busiest part of the boating season is here, and Sea Tow Captains get a firsthand look every day at both good and bad boating practices on the water. Those experiences help them to learn what works—and what doesn't.

Here are some tips from Sea Tow Captains how to avoid the common errors that many boaters make, and stay safe on the water.

#### **Shifter in Neutral?**

Sea Tow Captains ask the operator of a stalled boat a very simple question: Is the boat's engine in neutral when they are trying to start it?

"It can be something as simple as the boat being in gear or the safety lanyard not connected," explained Capt. Ryan Bayley, owner of Sea Tow Great South Bay in Oakdale, N.Y., on Long Island. "We often get people going again by asking those questions over the phone. With kids running around and people going back and forth, the shifter and the safety lanyard are often the cause of a boat not starting."



#### **Out of Fuel?**

Boaters don't always top off their fuel tanks—and that can lead to confusion over how much gas or diesel actually is in the tank.

"The gas gauge is notoriously unreliable on a boat," said Capt. Gary O'Reilly, owner of Sea Tow North Chesapeake out of Galena, M.D. "The gauge says half and before they know it, they are out of fuel."

Keeping a fuel log will help you keep tabs on your boat's fuel level. By knowing the capacity of your fuel tank, how many hours the engine has been run and an average number of gallons you burn per hour, you can get a rough idea of how much fuel is left or how many hours you may continue to run until empty. And always remember the golden rule for how much fuel you should have and how far you should go. Use 1/3 of your fuel for your trip out and 1/3 for your tip in, while keeping 1/3 in reserve for the unknown.

#### **Designated Skipper**

The Sea Tow Foundation recently launched its nationwide Designated Skipper campaign, which focuses on raising awareness about Boating Under the Influence (BUI) and preventing the accidents it can cause. Visit [www.DesignatedSkipper.com](http://www.DesignatedSkipper.com) to take the pledge to be sure there always is a sober operator designated for your boat or any boat you are aboard.

#### **Be Weather-Wise**

Knowing the current weather conditions and the forecast for your boating area can help you avoid problems when bad weather threatens, either by altering the float plan, bringing along extra gear, or postponing their outing.

"It might be warm and calm at your port but blowing hard where you are going," said Capt. Bayley. "Once you get everyone down to the boat, it's harder to call off the trip. Make sure you've done the research on the weather so you can make a good decision in advance."

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### **Battery Switch Savvy**

“Knowing how your battery charger works, and whether to have the switch on 1, 2 or “All” (or “Both”) is a big deal,” said Capt. O’Reilly. “A lot of people think “All” is the place to be, and then they run down their batteries and can’t start the boat.”

Boaters should start off with two fully charged batteries, then choose one of the two available battery switch positions for running, either 1 or 2. Only use the “All” or “Both” position if it is an emergency when both batteries are discharged to the point that neither of them alone will crank the engine over but two can do it together.

How do you know which battery switch setting to use? One way is by alternating their use, using 1 for odd-numbered days and 2 for even-numbered days.

### **Safety Equipment Check**

Keeping your boat’s safety equipment shipshape is the best way to avoid not having it available when you need it most. Verify that emergency flares and fire extinguisher(s) are not past their expiration dates and are still in good condition. Ensure all life jackets and the throwable cushion/ring are undamaged and ready for use. Make sure you have life jackets that fit all of your family members and any friends who may go out with you on the boat.

Update both your paper and electronic charts, and review them before each trip. Charts that are current will let you know where it is safe to boat and help you avoid grounding.

### **Get the Sea Tow App**

If you have an iPhone or Android, download the free Sea Tow App for smartphones at [www.seatow.com/app](http://www.seatow.com/app). It will put GPS, navigation, tides, weather and other information at your fingertips, as well as allowing you to call for help with the swipe of a thumb.

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