

FROM THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT



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One thing that you never want to experience is the loss of the Captain in the middle of a cruise. Although rare, it does happen and you should give some thought to how to be prepared to handle the situation.

The first thing to do to prepare for the possibility is to have a good idea of where you are going before leaving the dock. Tracing the trip on a chart will give you a sense of your surroundings and landmarks to look for. As your trip progresses, you can keep track of your approximate location on the chart, and of course, keep track of any variations to the planned cruise. If travelling on a smaller boat where laying out the typical 30" x 42" chart is not practical, cut an 11" x 17" section out covering your trip and laminate it to allow tracing the course using a grease pencil or similar while underway. If your boat is equipped with a GPS Chartplotter (or you have an iPad that you can use as one), the course can also be tracked on it and many have a "bread crumb" option (dotted or dashed line) showing the course.

Secondly, before leaving the dock, tour the boat to learn about the location of life preservers, fire extinguisher, flares, anchor, and other safety equipment; knowing where this equipment is will reduce stress and confusion should the need arise to use it. Also take a look at the steering mechanism, throttle and gear shift. Find the VHF radio and get some instructions on how to use it.

Third, get a little experience behind the wheel under the supervision of the Captain. Steering on a boat is different from steering in your car as your boat slides in a turn. The throttle and gear shift should be worked during your time behind the wheel to learn how to operate them smoothly. Don't look for the brake as there isn't one – while at the wheel, learn how to slow and come to a stop before you have to do it in a hurry!

What do you do if you find yourself taking over unexpectedly? Don't panic and immediately start calling for help! Take the wheel, reduce your speed and maneuver to an open location on the water where you can come to a stop and assess your situation. If the Captain has a medical emergency, hail the US Coast Guard on your VHF radio and ask for assistance. If the situation

allows (i.e., medical assistance is not urgent), review your location and determine your course back to a dock. You can head to one of two places – either head back to the dock that you came from by reversing your course or head to a nearby marina or public dock. When nearing the dock that you intend to tie up to, call the marina via your VHF radio on channel 16 (or cell phone if you know the number) or get the attention of someone on the dock to ask for help landing and tying up.

The key to your success is to plan ahead. A great part of planning ahead would be to take the VHF Radio, Using a Chart, Using GPS Chartplotter and Partner in Command seminars that will be offered on Monday, April 8, 15, 22 and 29, respectively. Go to ABCHH.org, click on Education and then Education Calendar from the dropdown menu. Find April 29 and then click on the seminar name of interest. While you are on the calendar, look for other courses and seminars that could help you improve your boating skills!

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