

Safer Operating Habits

On the Water Plus 65

If you notice that the way you operate your vessel has changed, it can be useful to adopt some safer habits to protect yourself and others on the water.

Every time you set out on your vessel, let your family or friends know and most importantly, be sure to Log On with Marine Rescue NSW. You can Log On with Marine Rescue NSW using your marine radio, mobile phone or via the MarineRescue app. It's quick and simple: give them details of your boat and tell them where you are heading, how many people are on board and when you plan to return. This is a free service that ensures a responsible emergency service knows you're out on the water and can monitor your trip. If you don't Log Off when you're expected back to shore, Marine Rescue NSW will start to search for you. More information on Marine Rescue NSW services and becoming a volunteer to help save lives on the water can be found at mrnsw.com.au

Before heading out on the water, check:

Weather and conditions forecasts for advanced notice of changing and/or adverse conditions.

- You and your passengers are wearing correctly fitted lifejackets appropriate to your activity
- That mandatory safety equipment is on board and within its expiry date
- If carrying fuel, ensure you have enough for your voyage and 30% extra for contingencies.
- Engine batteries are sufficiently charged
- Engine cooling water tell-tale is flowing unrestricted

- Your engine(s) has been serviced to manufacturers specifications and scheduling
- Your marine radio is operating well – you can get a radio check with a Marine Rescue NSW unit before you leave the shore and when you arrive at your destination
- Navigation Lights are all working
- Horn or other sound signal is working
- You have charts of the areas you will travel through

know your vessel - Take the time to familiarise yourself with all of your vessel controls such as throttle, helm, lights and anchoring operations.

Operate to the conditions - Reduce your speed in low visibility conditions like rain, fog or night driving. This gives you more time to respond to an unexpected event. If possible avoid driving in poor conditions. If you're already driving, anchor in a safe location such as an area in the lee of the wind or swell and wait for the conditions to improve, and regularly check that your anchor is not dragging. In very low visibility conditions such as heavy fog, use sound signals to alert nearby vessels to your location.

Operate at a Safe Speed - The operator of any boat or watercraft must always operate at a speed that is safe for the conditions and observe any sign posted speed limits. In determining a safe speed the vessel operator must take the following factors into consideration at all times:

- Visibility
- The traffic density, including concentrations of fishing vessels or any other vessels
- The manoeuvrability of the vessel, particularly the stopping distance and turning ability in the prevailing conditions
- At night the presence of background light such as from shore lights or from back scatter of your vessels own lights
- Wind, sea and current conditions, and the proximity of navigational hazards
- The draught in relation to the available depth of water.

Look for other waterway users - Always keep a proper lookout while operating any vessel.

Plan ahead - Identify safe haven locations along your passage, including courtesy and emergency moorings before you leave.

Share the helm - If you're planning a day on the water with family or friends or a long passage, share the helm, as fatigue affects everyone.

Use familiar waterways - Before you set out, plan your journey, even on familiar waterways, and avoid difficult situations such as bar crossings, heavy seas and high traffic areas.

Be well rested - Make sure you have a good night's sleep and are alert before operating a vessel. If you feel tired, take a break.

Avoid distractions - Minimise distractions so you can focus on safe navigation.

Avoid operating a vessel if you are unwell - When you're not feeling well, your risk of being in an incident increases. Wait until you feel better to navigate waterways

Make your vessel a safer vessel

Ensure your vessel has lifejackets that correctly fit all those on board.

Ensure inflatable lifejacket cylinders are firmly screwed in, have been correctly maintained and serviced.

Check your vessel has the correct safety equipment for where you want to go, and what you want to do.

Complete pre-start and shut-down checks of all vessel systems, fluids and oils.

Make regular and scheduled communication with other vessels, people at home and Marine Rescue NSW, especially if traveling off-shore or in rough conditions.

Follow your vessel's servicing schedule or work with your marine specialist to develop one.

If going offshore, carry a marine radio and an EPRIB on your vessel and make sure that everyone on board knows how to use them.

Detecting changes in your driving

Detecting changes in your own navigation can be difficult. These examples include some of the signs and situations that show your ability to drive safely might be changing.

Signs of changes in your navigation ability

- Constantly feeling tired when on the water
- Finding it difficult to read navigation lights/marks/signs, see in poor light or cope with glare
- Experiencing a number of 'close calls' or near misses, or being involved in a crash
- Friends or family expressing their concerns about your navigation, speed, awareness or reaction times
- Nervousness and loss of confidence at the helm
- Reacting to medications and feeling less alert or coordinated
- Finding it difficult to turn your head and see over your shoulder
- Finding it hard to handle difficult situations, including:
 - Being surprised by passing vessels
 - Finding hazard avoidance more difficult at the helm
 - Not realising how much wash you're generating
 - Finding it more difficult to gauge when to commence a bar crossing
 - Driving on the wrong side of the channel
 - Changing course too fast or too slowly
 - Deploying or retrieving your vessel from a car trailer
 - Driving into waterway infrastructure or foreshores
 - Keeping your vessel on course in varying conditions
 - Judging the optimal and safest course for your vessel in varying conditions.