

# **DYING TO CATCH FISH,** **DON'T DIE CATCHING FISH!**

3/24/05

Safety Equipment, Boat Mechanicals, Weather & Navigation knowledge is the difference between a fun, safe, successful fishing trip and a disaster. Remember the guy who was rescued off of Brigantine a while ago? He almost died because of stupid mistakes HE made! No compass, no charts, no VHF radio, no protection from the sun and obviously, NO CLUE! Preparation for a day of fishing is simple, yet so important to do for your safety and the safety of your crew. I've always said there's a fine line between having a small problem and having a life threatening one.

First and foremost, have all the proper safety equipment aboard and make sure everyone knows where it is. If you're going offshore, have type I PFD's with reflective tape, whistles and strobes attached to them. Carry extra flares (check expiration dates). Watch your fuel consumption. You should know your boat's range. The rule is one third out, one third in and one-third in reserve. Bring extra VHF radios and store them in waterproof zip lock plastic bags. You can usually borrow one from a slip neighbor for a day trip.

Second, make sure the boat is mechanically sound. That means the bilge pumps, blowers, gauges, horns, radios, lights, compass, GPS, Fishfinder, anchor and of course the engine are all working properly. Don't overload the boat with too much fishing gear and too many people.(how fat are your fishing buddies!) Third, CHECK THE WEATHER! It sounds stupid, but bad weather is a killer and although most forecasters could do a better job with a dartboard, you still need to heed their warning. You, as the Captain need to constantly look skyward for changing weather patterns. If the boat swings differently at anchor or flags change direction or anything else happens that looks ominous, head for home. Check your VHF weather station often. Allow enough time to get back home in bad weather. 25mph isn't happening in rough seas! When you hear waves are 2'-4', that means that 70% of the waves will be between 2'-4'. 15% will be less than 2' and 15% will be more than 4'. Fishing in a 20' open boat in 2'-4' is probably not a good idea and will be uncomfortable fishing. 2'-4' can turn into 3'-5' in no time and guess what, you're in trouble!

Lastly, navigation is just a wee bit important. We laugh, but getting lost and disoriented happens all the time with deadly consequences. If you don't have local knowledge of an inlet, go out with someone who does first. Get familiar with Head and Following Seas and learn how your boat handles in them. Have the knowledge and be prepared to come in an alternate inlet just in case of bad weather. Always have back up paper charts in case of GPS failure and know how to use them. Know how to use your compass and plot your Dead Reckoning position. Know reciprocal course headings. If your heading is over 180\*, subtract 180\* for the reverse course. If your heading is under 180\*, add 180\* for the reverse course. Take into account wind and current, you do know the direction of the wind and current don't you? We know being Christopher Columbus sounds appealing, but make sure you file a float plan with family or friends and notify them upon your return. Finding your boat at night with no known location is like finding a penny in a dark room, good luck!

With the proper safety equipment, a good running boat, fair winds, calm seas, GPS & Charts and some proven knowledge and skill, you'll be ready for a fun, safe, successful fishing trip and a great day out on the water. Now, get out there and bring me back some fish!