

THE COXSWAIN SHACK

SURFACE OPS PATROL TIPS & TRICKS

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Developing a Patrol “Philosophy”

Already in this short series of columns, I’ve referred several times to a “productive” patrol. And by “productive”, I mean a patrol where the Coast Guard gets something of value for their investment in training and reimbursing us. We’ve all heard about those who seem to want to just “bore holes in the water”, i.e., cruise around all day, taking in the sights, without having to get dirty with actual SAR work.

Fortunately, such members are in the minority, but some exist. You’ll encounter those who deem a patrol successful if they don’t have to rinse the boat down after patrol! Or those who simply want to “show the flag” without getting tied up in a lengthy tow or have to de-water or render other assistance.

One thought is that we should hope for a totally incident-free patrol, believing that our Safety Checks and PE Courses are working. If only that were so. The truth is that no matter how many Safety Checks a boat has had, nor how much training her skipper has acquired, there are plenty of things which can cause them to run into trouble. Consider how much flotsam and debris floats around the waters of our AOR, sometimes nearly hidden from view. The pilings under most piers in San Francisco Bay begin to rot out the day after they’re installed! And when they give way, they float around, often nearly fully submerged, just waiting for someone to smash into them.

And even engines that are well-maintained can break down due to all sorts of mechanical failures. Note that these are issues which may develop no matter how many times the boat has been inspected or how many classes the skipper has taken!

Take a look at the report below from a recent California Boating Safety Report.

Year	Accidents	Injuries	Fatalities	Property Damage
1987	905	325	54	\$3,381,600
1988	745	333	51	\$2,396,100
1989	632	371	43	\$3,669,800
1990	761	416	50	\$3,131,200
1991	750	421	58	\$2,653,800
1992	689	447	59	\$4,360,100
1993	743	434	67	\$2,052,800
1994	709	386	40	\$1,740,300
1995	833	490	52	\$2,536,500
1996	850	537	56	\$2,241,700
1997	925	526	43	\$3,266,800
1998	772	413	58	\$2,299,600
1999	907	491	42	\$2,864,000
2000	906	524	51	\$3,038,400
2001	907	502	48	\$2,841,900
2002	911	468	53	\$3,732,850
2003	963	502	61	\$3,820,000
2004	744	439	44	\$4,073,400
2005	800	428	58	\$3,578,700

Note how the numbers of accidents, injuries, fatalities and property damage have remained remarkably similar over the years, even despite our VE and PE efforts! To be “productive” we don’t need to wish for any increases in these statistics. A popular and justifiable patrol philosophy is for us to wish that the accidents and SAR cases that statistics tell us are going to occur anyway, happen on a weekend patrol day, when we’re out there ready to respond, rather than at 0200 on some weekday when we aren’t on patrol!

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