



onCOURSE with the USCG AUXILIARY

Additional Safety Equipment Every Boater Should Have

Last week Frank wrote about Personal Flotation Devices (PFD) also known as life jackets. Wearing a PFD by itself, however, is just the beginning.

Many members of the Coast Guard Auxiliary serve as boat crew and coxswains on Coast Guard Operational Facilities conducting safety patrols. Of course, we wear our PFD's, but in addition, members of the Coast Guard and Auxiliary are required to carry additional safety equipment on their PFD's. This equipment, although not legally required, has and does save lives every day.



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with additional content
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The first item we would recommend is attaching a signal mirror to your PFD. These can be attached with a lanyard to the PFD and stored in your pocket. A signal mirror can be seen over ten miles away. Recently, three boaters were rescued when they used a signal mirror to attract a NYPD Helicopter. What is clear is that without the mirror, our "hapless sailors" as the Daily News called them, would have spent a great deal more time waiting for help, and one of the three might have died from exposure.

The second item of additional equipment that we suggest you have on your PFD is a whistle. Why a whistle? Because they typically have a range of a half mile or greater, and your voice will never be heard over the waves and the wind should you go overboard. Again, use a lanyard for the whistle so if you drop it while in the water you won't lose it. The Coast Guard Auxiliary requires its members to carry a whistle attached to their PFD's with a lanyard.

The third item we suggest is a strobe light. The Coast Guard Auxiliary requires its members to carry a strobe that you can turn on, when and if you go overboard during the night. A strobe can be seen for miles in the dark.

The fourth item is reflective tape. That's the same type of tape that is worn on firefighter jump suits, police rain coats, buoys and other items that need to reflect light at night. Affix the reflective tape to your PFD on the top of the back and in front. This way, should a light be shown in your direction, a reflection will be seen. My Coast Guard/Auxiliary PFD has reflective tape.

The fifth item is personal flares. These small flares, which are carried in the pocket of your PFD, are used when you find yourself in need to attract attention, while in the

water. Coast Guard Auxiliary personnel are required to carry flares if we are going into non-protected waters (i.e., the ocean).

The last item we in the Coast Guard are required to carry, and suggest that you have access to as well, is a safety knife. This knife, which has a straight 6 – 8" blade with a blunt tip and serrated edge for cutting and ripping is also attached to our PFD.

All these items add to our safety, and they can add to your safety. The overall cost is small; especially when you consider that they can save your life.

If I had to limit myself to the two most important items to attach to every PFD on board, I would choose the 2 items which are easiest to learn to use, and lightweight – the signal mirror and signal whistle. Your children can use them, your grandparents can use them, they take very little energy, and as our "hapless sailors" found out, they work.

This year, why not invest a few dollars on safety, by making sure all your PFD's are in good condition and purchasing some extra equipment that I and the Coast Guard family hope you never have to use.

If you would like additional information on personal floatation devices, additional safety equipment or the USCG Auxiliary, please visit our local Flotilla website at <http://a0130804.uscgaux.info>.