

Make Someone's Day

Capt. Tommy Thompson

It's always a thrill to return from a day of fishing with a cooler full of fish, but it's a better one to return with all hands safe or well cared for.

Boating and fishing safety is important, and most of us do our very best while we're out on the water, but some things just happen. Having both the knowledge and the tools to provide good, basic first aid should be a 'must' aboard every vessel afloat. When things 'do happen', and you're prepared, you'll be glad you planned for the unwanted eventuality of injuries afloat.

Boating first aid is the quick response to physical injuries. For the most part, it's dealing with simple situations that are easily prepared for, but in some cases, the application of basic first aid knowledge can prevent minor injuries from getting worse, or in the best-case scenario, save lives.

The ailments of most interest to the average fisherman are those dealing with minor burns, seasickness, and punctures from fishing tackle. Other more critical, but less frequent, injuries include broken bones, burns from electrical or chemical sources, serious cuts, and dehydration. Most serious are the occasions where a crewmember or guest is stricken with cardiovascular trouble, drownings, or suffers hypothermia.

To best prepare for emergencies, big and small, aboard your boat, it's important to have both the means and the knowledge to handle the situation. The means is simple—a 'first aid kit' assembled specifically for your boat. The knowledge is simple, too. It just involves taking the time to learn a few first aid basics.

Your first aid kit needs to reflect your choice of boat and style of fishing. An inshore fishing boat that can quickly make port with an injured passenger need not carry the extended-care supplies that are necessary on a boat that travels out many miles. Also, space is certainly a limiting factor on small flats boats as compared with offshore cruisers and sport fishermen styles. It's always best to make a list of your required supplies, and then try to fit it aboard. Good storage options include ammo-style plastic boxes or sealed waterproof cases, but zipper-style bags are great for smaller boats.

Your supply list should include the basics, including bandages, anti-bacterial ointment, soap for cleaning cuts, sunburn ointment and some mild analgesics. A good hook remover kit (with instructions) is not a bad thing to include in your basic kit. You'll also want to consider whether or not to pack rubbing alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, gauze and tape, seasickness remedies, or even anti-diarrheal medications. Contact lens solution is not a bad idea, as it's an easy way to flush foreign matter from someone's eye. If your fishing is a family affair, you might consider asking your family physician for advice pertaining to individual family members needs. For example, if a family member suffers from frequent seasickness, perhaps a prescription medication is appropriate to include in your first aid box. More advanced and sophisticated first aid kits should certainly include emergency 'space' blankets, burn treatments, and splint-making material. If it will fit in the box and the box will fit in the boat, take it along.

As important as having a well-assembled first aid kit is the knowledge to use it. Of course, everything you buy comes with instructions these days, and it's probably a good idea to read at least some of them. A good basic first aid course is needed, too. Many are offered at local colleges and universities, as well as by the American Red Cross. A CPR course is also a necessity, as it can really make the difference in life and death if immediate professional help is not close at hand. CPR courses are offered in every community, and it's recommended that you review the techniques yearly to keep refreshed. All of these courses are well worth

their bargain prices and don't take long. In fact, most are offered in the evenings so not to interfere with 'fishing Saturdays'.

Spend a rainy day building and including a custom first aid kit as part of your 'essential' fishing and boating gear. Take a break from tying flies or cleaning reels and spend an evening taking a CPR or First Aid Course.

In the long run, if you have an emergency aboard, major or minor, you'll really make someone's day by being prepared and getting them ashore in good shape, patched up, and safe.