

Fire Safety on Boats

On average, approximately 90 fire-related accidents and injuries occur on boats every year, with fires on privately owned boats resulting in at least three deaths every year.

Boats pose very different fire risks to buildings, but by applying some common-sense you can minimise the risk of fire and protect both your vessel and crew.

Fire prevention

- Fit a smoke alarm – optical sensor alarms with hush buttons and ‘sealed for life’ batteries are best for boats. Visit www.boatsafetyscheme.com/fire for advice and guidance.
- Check that furnishings and foam insulation is fire retardant. Boats built after 1988 should have fire retardant materials fitted in seating and linings as standard. When buying second hand furniture check it bears the BS Permanent Flame Resistant mark.
- Allow for the movement and vibration of the boat. Run any wiring looms through a secured conduit to avoid chafing.
- Only use safety matches on board as vibration could ignite non-safety matches.
- Store any solvents, lubricating oils, cleaning agents etc. upright in secure containers. Battery boxes should also be secured and contained in a vented store.



- Fit at least two fire extinguishers, which should be located on secure brackets near the cabin exit(s). A dry powder extinguisher in 2Kg or 4Kg capacity is suitable for a variety of types of fire (Class A, B, and C). Carbon Dioxide extinguishers are useful for electrical fires and unlike Dry Powder leave no residue. A Foam extinguisher is more versatile and lighter than an equivalent water extinguisher and is effective on liquid fires involving hydrocarbons but not cooking fires.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service

Endeavour House, Russell Road, Ipswich, IP1 2BX

Tel: 01473 260588

Email: fire.businesssupport@suffolk.gov.uk



For this reason it is also advisable to have a fire blanket in the galley area. Fire blankets can also be used as a body wrap to extinguish burning clothes.

- Engine compartments can be protected with an Automatic fire extinguisher. The extinguisher is installed above or adjacent the engine and is fitted with a heat sensitive glass bulb sprinkler head which operates automatically if a fire occurs. Chemical Dry Powder and FE-36 Clean Agent suppressants are available. Clean Agent extinguishers are often preferred as they leave no residue and will not damage sensitive electrical equipment.
- Some heaters and LPG burning appliances can produce lethal Carbon Monoxide (CO) if flues and vents become blocked. Fit a CO detector in the main cabin near sleeping areas to provide early warning of CO build up.
- Gas cylinders should be secured in a sealed, weatherproof container vented to the atmosphere.
- Turn off gas valves to cookers and heaters when not in use.
- Only carry spare fuel if absolutely necessary and then, only in approved containers. Always store fuel on an upper deck.
- Don't smoke in sleeping areas, galleys and in or near engine compartments.
- Extinguish cigarettes properly and use a solid ash tray that will remain stable on a boat. Empty ash trays regularly and dispose of stubs safely in fireproof bins.

Check List: prior to using your boat and before every journey, check it for possible fire risks and ensure you are properly equipped.

- Check the engine compartment for fuel leaks and allow the compartment to ventilate before starting the engine. Fuel lines and tanks should be checked for any cracks or leaks. The engine should be stopped for refuelling.
- Any compartment which has not been used for some time should be ventilated thoroughly.
- Check gas cylinders are secure.
- Check the fire extinguisher gauges are showing the correct pressure.
- If you are carrying crew or guests make sure they know where to find fire fighting equipment and escape routes.
- Check that safety equipment is on board including an adequate number of life jackets.
- Hand pump the bilges to vent any low lying vapours.

In the event of a fire

- Try to remain calm.
- Report the fire to the emergency services.
- If possible, isolate any gas and fuel lines to reduce the risk of explosion, and alert nearby craft to the danger.
- If it is safe to do so, tackle the fire using relevant extinguisher.
- If the fire is out of control, abandon ship.

Note: If you use pleasure craft, such as yachts, sailing boats and motorboats, there are certain safety regulations you must follow. Get safety advice and find out what you must do to make sure you and those travelling with you are safe on board.

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