

## **March Blog.**

### **Revisited Ideas!!!!**

Our aim is to tidy the yard and get rid of any rubbish that we have accumulated. Get boats ready for the new sailing season although we can't offer sailing instruction at present we still need to maintain our club boats and make sure that when we do get a new Chief Instructor Sailing they are up and running to go with courses. So sorting out the club boat park is essential. I would love to see boats on racks so will welcome cheap ideas to do this. I visit other clubs and saw something that might work with a bit of paint and a few poles. But I am just one person and this is a members club so I will float my idea at a meeting and see what response I get. You will soon learn that I do not throw my teddy out with the bath water if I don't get my own way, Life is too short and other people can have better ideas.

I don't really know what we will be doing but, please bring spades, shovels, metal wheelbarrows and maybe pickaxes! A tool kit might also be handy. There will also be admin roles, sweeping and potentially a bit of boat moving. No one will be in sole charge we will have a list of jobs that anyone can add too. You are more than welcome to come along and just sit relax and have a cup of tea.

So, please come along we really do need you. Also, it is a fun chance to meet new people and friends you have not seen for a while plus the chance for a bit of outdoor exercise to help those new year's resolutions along!

We also need people with organisational skills planning club events like a Fun day/Regatta things that will make your club more user friendly. So please don't sit there thinking there is nothing to do. (THERE IS)

### **Are you safe on the Water?**

If you are anything like me you will always think it will never happen to me,

### **Introduction & Safety to our VHF Radio Refresher!**

I thought this month I would look at VHF radios. I can never cover all the materials in a short one session (or a short blog!) so this is very much aimed at being refreshers and reminders for those with licenses and an introduction to why a course is a good idea for those without. We have an instructor at the club Dave Bointon but you can get details of the course from Pete Mears.

### **Why bother with a VHF Radio – why not just carry a mobile phone?**

The reasons will differ in different locations and for different boaters but there are many advantages to using a VHF on board. The VHF is designed to work on the water, they are usually waterproof and ergonomically designed for wet hands! They may provide us with a position, allow us to speak to multiple people at once and have potentially have direction finding capability for rescue services to find us. Depending on the type we may have better battery facilities than a smartphone. Our unique identifier on most of our radios also enables emergency services to match up contact information to ascertain who it is and where we are if we need help.

The mobile phone is of course useful at sea. It is great for calling friends and coverage may be fine but it is not designed to be used at sea. Many mobiles are not waterproof and who has tried to operate a touchscreen with wet hands! In the case of emergency, it is harder for the rescue services to locate us if we are not quite sure where we are ourselves. It also means that we only speak to one

person when requesting help and boats nearby that might be able to offer immediate assistance don't know that we require help.

### **Licensing & The Law:**

It is better to encourage you to get the paperwork right by explaining the benefits and advantages rather than beating you with a legal stick! Feel free to ask questions. Whether it's a new radio or you've had the radio for years please just ask. So, what do you need?

### **Authority to Operate**

#### VHF Radio Refresher - SRC Short Range Certificate

You will require an Authority to Operate a VHF Marine Radio. This is about you as a person using any VHF. The qualification is obtained by taking the SRC (Short Range Certificate) Course, often referred to as the VHF course. This is a course we run. You can take the course online or in the classroom. The classroom course takes a day usually.

The online course can be accessed as and when you like. Either all in one sitting or over a series of weeks/months. You expect to spend about 8-10 hours on it. You will receive a course book to keep. The course is £65 online or £85 in classroom. There is a final assessment to sit which needs to take place at an RYA Training Centre like us. This costs £60 payable to the RYA. Course details are on our website.

#### Ship Radio License:

VHF Radio refresher - Ship Radio License It sounds very grand particularly for those of us with small boats but, in essence, any radio needs to be licensed. This is FREE of charge online via OFCOM. There are two different types of licenses. If you have a fixed VHF set wired in on your boat, you require a Ship Radio License. If you have a handheld or portable you require a Ship Portable Radio License. Any other equipment that you have onboard which can transmit a signal also needs to be included on the license.

### **Why bother with these bits of paper?**

The Authority to Operate is simple to obtain once you have done the course. It is an assessment but no need to be afraid of that. As instructors all we want to know is that you have understood the information on the course. Any issues we will carry on teaching until you are ready, But in reality if you have completed the course you will be fine. You don't need any prior knowledge to take the course and it is suitable for skippers or crew. It is also a legal requirement to have the qualification (otherwise than in an emergency).

Why take the course? In all honesty I feel that you will become a safer and more confident boater with the knowledge gained.

### **Coordinated Information:**

The radio license from OFCOM again is not only a requirement but it brings together all the contact information in case of an emergency. If you have a DSC radio (one with a 'red button') you will be allocated a MMSI number. This is a unique number to that radio and is transmitted during digital calls. Should you be reported missing or overdue the coastguard may send a routine call to you, to check you are ok.

*A boat was reported overdue, last week. The coastguard sent a routine call to the boat radio but received no reply. As a result the lifeboat was launched. Fortunately, all ended well as the boat was found at anchor staying overnight in an inlet. Had the radio have been on it could have prevented a search operation.*

Confidence:

People often say they only plan to use the radio in an emergency so aren't bothering to get the paperwork in place. The reality is that the course will give you confidence to trouble shoot your radio to ensure you have the maximum chance of rescue. The license ensures the coastguard has contact details and information to hand.

A little story I heard,

*"A few years ago a lady approached me to book a course for her husband. She then asked if I thought she should do the course – she was reluctant due to the assessment. I suggested she came along, did the course and then made a decision as to whether to sit the assessment. She took it and of course got full marks, having enjoyed the course. But the real point is that 10 days later the same lady came back to see us, and they had a fire on their boat that weekend. She said she was amazed at how calm she was as she felt able to deal with the radio communications whilst her partner investigated the fire. All ended well and the fire was fortunately confined to the engine bay. She was incredibly glad to have taken the course and felt it had added to their safety.*

### **Different types of Radio:**

So many choices but first of all do you need a fixed radio, a handheld portable or a combination? Next do you need a DSC radio?

Which leads me to ask what is DSC? DSC is Digital Selective Calling and rather than just voice calls the radio can send digital transmissions too. For most people now a DSC radio (one with a 'red button') is a good option. You can very quickly send a distress message simply by pressing and holding the red button in. It will in most cases then send your location and identity to not only the coastguard but other boats nearby.

Two limitations of DSC: They are slightly higher cost, and the battery life is less for portables.

There are several manufacturers around. Personally, we tend to use Icom due to their amazing customer service, the menu structures and my own experience of how durable the radios are. However, there are other good manufacturers as well and it is a personal choice on cost and features required.

If your radio is a digital set, does it have an information source for its location? Many have inbuilt GPS receivers now but if your radio says no position found it is important to check this out as a significant safety feature is not working.

### **Radio Discipline:**

We often talk about brevity clarity and discipline on the radio. It is important to understand how to use the radio properly and follow the structures. This enables more people to use the radio and may prevent you from blocking an emergency call. On the course you will talk about prohibited actions, prowords, range, low power and high power, channel use and the phonetic alphabet. Who can you call? What are you allowed to discuss?

If you heard the words 'Seelonce Mayday' broadcast over the radio would you understand what that meant? It is important for safety that you do, and these are covered on the course.

Use of the Radio and Settings:

By listening to your radio, it can contribute to your safety. The benefits of harbour control channels and knowing shipping movements will greatly improve not only your safety but prevent you being a hindrance! After your course where do you find information about which channels to use? Almanacs, charts, harbour guides and websites are all important sources of information.

The 'National Coastwatch Institution' 'NCI' have a dedicated channel (65) and can provide radio checks plus information on weather.

This led nicely onto to the various features, buttons and setting on VHF radios. From backlighting to volume to squelch and a discussion about how useful dual watch can be. This is particularly important in busy waterways or for those carrying out safety boat patrols.

Calls – Routine, Distress, Urgency and Safety

Next up were calls, routine voice calls, routine digital calls and onto distress, urgency calls. Some who have not undertaken training will dismiss the need to know about routine digital calls. However, digital calls can increase your confidence and use of the radio. If you use DSC there is no need to talk on channel 16 which makes the process quicker and less intimidating.

What to do if you receive a routine call. Often when a radio beeps people turn it off without reading the screen – what if it is the coastguard calling you to check an overdue report? The great thing about digital calls is that whatever channel you are on your radio will beep if you receive a digital call and when you accept the call it will automatically default to the channel the caller has chosen.

### **VHF Radio Refresher - Mayday Card**

On most of our courses we run through the Mayday call, when to make it and how. The level of detail in the call is important too. It is a great idea to have a proforma of the call written out and kept next to the helm position to ensure all crew know what to say. None of us know how we would react in an emergency so why not make it easier?

### **Safety Briefings:**

It is important to ensure that crew know how to use the radio. The basics of how to raise a distress alert, to hold in the push to talk button to talk but release it to hear a reply and how to work out where they are to give a position.

### **Conclusion:**

Understanding your radio and being licensed makes your boating safer and more enjoyable. The course should not be seen as a trial, it's something to engage with and to apply to your boating.

It is important we follow the protocols to protect everyone but don't be afraid to use the radio if need for both routine or emergency calls.