

208a – Boat Launching Safety Guidelines

TO: All Personnel Assigned to MC-252 Response

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FROM: Planning Safety Team

POSITION: Mobile ICP Planning Safety

SUBJECT: Guidelines for Safe Boat Launching During Response Activities

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Time: 1800 Hours

Purpose: The purpose of this document is to provide general safety guidelines that should be followed for launching boats for various marine operations during response activities. Due to the large number of boats being utilized during response activities, boat launching safety is a topic that should be reviewed and discussed often. Boats and their operators involved in this response have been mobilized from across the country and often are not familiar with local launch facilities and waterways. These recommendations are for response operations and are not intended to replace site or project-specific operating and emergency response procedures and policies.

The following Specific Safety Plans address potential hazards and should be reviewed in conjunction with this ICS 208a and are found under the Operational ICS 208a as follows:

- AA-General Project Safety Considerations
- Boat to Boat Transfer of Personnel
- Boating Safety
- Carbon Monoxide Poisoning
- Driving Safety
- Heat Stress
- Inclement Weather
- Lighting Requirements for Night Operations
- Vehicle Backing Safety

REMEMBER, EVERYONE HAS THE OBLIGATION TO STOP THE JOB IF AN UNSAFE ACT OR CONDITION IS IDENTIFIED!

General Procedures:

1. Get Familiar With the Launch Site: Before you head to the boat launch location, gather information about the launch ramp. If you're not sure where to find this information, ask marina or launch personnel for details regarding the launch location. Important facts to know include the total number of boat launch ramps, and whether they are gravel or concrete, as well as how steep the ramps are and their general condition. These factors can help you determine whether or not your vehicle can safely navigate the ramp. Remember to obtain and review directions to the boat launching ramp prior to departure.

2. Review Regulations for Launching and Loading Boats: It is important to be familiar with both State and local boating regulations and laws before you launch a boat. Knowing and understanding these regulations increases safety for yourself and those around you. In addition, you will need to pack the right equipment. The United States Coast Guard has set minimum standards on the type of equipment you are required to have on board your vessel. The minimum equipment standards are as follows:

Car 6/29/10

- Personal Flotation Devices (ensure you have one for every passenger)
- Fire Extinguishers (ABC Type Extinguisher)
- Visual Distress Signals
- Marine Radio
- Navigation Lights and Sound-Producing Devices
- First Aid Kit
- Adequate Food and Water
- Flashlight
- Personal Items (sunscreen, extra clothing, medication, etc.)
- Maps of the Local Area
- Magnetic Compass
- Anchor
- Bilge Pump or Bailing Device
- Adequate Fuel for Your Trip

3. Prepare the Boat Before Launching: It is important to note that boat launch ramps usually have a staging area where you can prepare for your boat launch. Be polite, and avoid prepping your boat on the actual ramp because it can create delays and chaos for other boaters. Conduct as much of the preparation work as possible offsite, before you reach your boat launching destination.

Check your boat registration to ensure it has not expired. In addition, you will want to make sure your boat has enough fuel for your trip. Examine the condition of your boat trailer before you leave for the launching site. Inspect the tires to make sure they are properly inflated and replace them if they show signs of wear and tear. Test the trailer lights to make sure they work, and examine the straps that secure your boat to the trailer. Finally, load your boat with the equipment you need for your work activities.

4. Launching the Boat: When you arrive at the boat launching site, inspect the launch area prior to moving the boat into position and determine a safe launch can be made. Inspect and prepare for the boat launch using the following steps as a guideline:

- Check the boat damage that could have been caused by the transportation of the boat
- Disconnect any wiring between the trailer and boat
- Remove the tarp and straps that secured the boat to the trailer
- Put the keys into the boat's console
- Secure the drain plug in place
- Remove the winch line from the bow of the boat and connect the bow line
- Never attempt to launch a boat by yourself; use a partner to assist in a safe launch
- Review the launch procedures and hand signals you plan to use with your partner
- Never allow you partner to stand between the boat and your vehicle used to tow the boat
- When necessary, use additional personnel to assist with traffic control if streets or access ways will be blocked during the boat launch
- Secure the boat to the launch area or dock as soon as possible after the launch
- Never leave the boat unattended
- Move your vehicle and trailer to a safe parking area and secure them

5. Leaving the Launch Site: Once the boat has been fully prepared to depart the launch site, it is the boat captain's responsibility to assure the safe departure of the boat and the passengers. The following procedures should be followed when leaving the launch area:

CAS 6/29/10

- Once the boat has been started, verify that the engine(s) are working properly
- Have the passengers remain seated and still while navigating away from the dock or fixed features
- Prior to backing away from the dock, assure your anticipated course is clear of other boats and obstructions
- Use verbal communications to provide nearby boats of your intentions to navigate
- Obey speed limits and wake zones as posted
- Advise your passengers prior to increasing speed or making sudden changes in course

6. Returning to the Launch Site: Once the days work activities have been completed it is the boat captain's responsibility to ensure the safe return of the boat and the occupants. The following procedures should be followed when returning to the launch area:

- Verify that the engine(s) are working properly
- Have the passengers remain seated and still while navigating toward the dock or fixed features
- Ensure your anticipated course is clear of other boats
- Use verbal communications to provide nearby boats of your intentions to navigate
- Obey speed limits and wake zones as posted
- Ensure the launch is clear and no vehicles are preparing to back into the dock area to make a launch that would interfere with your return and docking
- Secure the boat to the dock or disembarkation area as soon as possible upon arrival
- Advise your passengers after the boat has been secured that they may exit the boat
- Remove the keys from the ignition of the boat
- Never leave the boat unattended
- Move the trailer into position to retrieve the boat making sure the boat can be safely winched onto the trailer
- Make sure the winch is securely fastened to the boat before winching is started
- Once the boat has been winched onto the trailer, assure the boat has been secured prior to moving the boat and trailer out of the launch area
- When necessary, use personnel to assist with traffic control if streets or access ways will be blocked during the boat removal from the launch area
- Make sure the boat trailer is secured to the vehicle and that the trailer lights are working properly

Roles and Responsibilities: The role of the Boat Captain is unchanged. All personnel have the authority and responsibility to stop unsafe acts. Practice the "Buddy" system and follow all safety procedures of the Boat Captain and Site Safety Officer.

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6/29/10