

Tips for ensuring safe, trouble-free boating this summer

✔ Get your engine serviced

Make sure your boat's engine is up to the job. Schedule an annual service and make regular visual checks.

✔ Change your fuel

If your boat has been out of the water for a while, it pays to replace old fuel with clean, fresh fuel. Never assume your trip will run exactly according to plan – always plan to use a third of your fuel for the trip out, a third for the trip back, and have a third in reserve to allow for anything unexpected.

✔ Give your boat a good once-over

Take a thorough look and make sure everything on your boat is in good working order. Start in one place and work your way around the boat, checking everything, inside and out. If you find anything that is damaged or worn, repair it properly or replace it.

✔ Check your lifejackets

Before reuse, make sure that lifejackets are still the correct size (especially for children) and in good condition. Check that your lifejackets are suitable for the type of boating you do. If you have an inflatable, make sure it's checked and serviced, and regularly check that the gas cylinder is properly secured and not corroded. Remember, too, that lifejackets do not work unless they are worn.

✔ Check your equipment

Look at all of the equipment on your boat and make sure it works properly. Check expiry dates on flares and fire extinguishers, and replace them if they're out of date. Make sure the boat's battery is professionally checked so that it will be capable of operating all electric equipment and have enough strength to start the motor. After lying idle over winter, batteries have a habit of providing a start or two before failing completely. Check batteries on portable equipment such as torches, radios and your GPS, and replace them if you need to. Make sure your distress beacon's registration is up to date.

✔ Think about your emergency plan

Look at where your safety equipment is stored. Can you access it easily in an emergency or after a capsizing? Put together a floating 'grab bag' that contains all the emergency gear you will need should your boat capsize. Remember, the best place to store a lifejacket is on your person, with a means of communication in your pocket or attached to you!

Before you go out, brief your crew or passengers on what to do if things go wrong, and practise different scenarios – be mentally prepared for the unexpected.

✔ Wear your lifejacket or PFD

Maritime law requires ALL skippers to carry enough lifejackets of the right size for everyone on board. Lifejackets must also be worn in any situation where there is an increased risk to safety.*

*The Government is currently considering a law change that would make it compulsory for lifejackets to be worn at all times on vessels under 6 metres, unless the skipper gives permission for them to be removed.

✔ Check the marine weather forecast before you go

If in doubt, don't go out. And keep checking the forecast while you are out, using VHF channel 21.

✔ Carry at least two reliable forms of marine communication

A distress beacon (EPIRB or PLB) and a handheld, waterproof marine VHF radio are the most reliable forms of emergency communication. Flares (red handheld, orange smoke and red parachute or rocket) are another useful way to signal that you need help. If carried, cell phones should be inside a resealable plastic bag, but should not be relied on as your only form of communication.

✔ Don't go overboard on alcohol

Alcohol impairs judgement and balance, and its effects are exaggerated on the water. Consumption of alcohol increases the risk of hypothermia and will reduce your survival time if you end up in the water.

✔ Make a trip report

Let someone responsible know where you're going and when you expect to be back.

✔ Be considerate to other water users

Keep a lookout, stick to safe speeds and be patient, so that everyone can enjoy the water.

