



## Coast Guard Auxiliary Recreational Boating Safety Exhibit Guide

Prepared by the US Coast Guard Auxiliary National Marketing Group (December 2009 update)

**Introduction:** The number of boaters who drowned not wearing a life jacket has remained at 90 percent for the past ten years. For that reason, its time to approach boating safety exhibits differently to get better results. Take a moment and ask yourself, what is the purpose of having the exhibit? We believe you will agree the reason is to attract visitors and share your message with them. So make good use of these proven concepts that will make your exhibit a success.

**Goal:** Reduce boating fatalities by promoting “Wear It” to most at risk boaters and boating education courses. Publicizing America’s Waterway Watch is a linked message.

**Method:** Make an exhibit display say, “Come see me” to promote “Wear It” and About Boating Safely courses to the recreational boating public using tried and proven marketing techniques. A professionally designed and staffed RBS exhibit will boost member recruiting.

**Four Principals of Recreational Boating Safety are:**

- ❖ Life Jackets Save Lives - Wear a Life Jacket
- ❖ Knowledgeable Boaters Save Lives - Take a Boating Course.
- ❖ Safe Boats Save Lives – Get a Free Vessel Safety Check.
- ❖ Sober Boaters Save Lives – Never Boat Under the Influence.

**Groups of boaters most at risk for a boating fatality:**

- ❖ Operators of open outboard motor boats 21’ and smaller.
- ❖ Males 20 – 50 years old and all anglers.
- ❖ Canoe/kayak paddlers.

**Approachability is the key:** According to Florida Boating Law Administrator Captain Richard Moore, an effective exhibit is 1. The topical nature of the exhibit; 2. The personality of the people manning the exhibit and their ability to “draw you in” and, 3. Some sort of freebee. “ If the personality and topical nature of the exhibit needs are met, there will be plenty of dialogue. Leave one out, and approachability will be diminished.”

An exhibit must be able to attract a visitor’s attention and entice them to stop. It takes a visitor about four seconds to walk the length of a ten foot exhibit space. You are in competition with other event distractions for that short time. In addition to planning the display, selecting the right Auxiliarists to operate it, and having them appropriately attired is equally important.

The concept for a successful exhibit is for visitors to be able to relate to the Auxiliarists staffing it as “affable” rather than “authority” figures. Auxiliarists must be physically and mentally able to perform the demanding duties, and remain personable. We recognize it is sometimes difficult to obtain enough volunteers to stand watch. If you have those who volunteer read this guide, your Exhibit Operating Procedure, and Inflatable Life Jacket Basics article ahead of time, they will know what is expected. If they are still up to the task, they will have a “job description” for the duties, and be able to answer questions about inflatable life jackets.

The Exhibit Operating Procedure (sample at the end) covers procedures, appearance and hygiene, which are important considerations. Tabletops are for display items and not a resting place for hats, jackets, reading materials or water bottles. Eating at the exhibit should not be permitted and breath mints are a good idea. Watch standers should stand or use backless stools (no chairs) to maintain eye contact, and not more than two in an exhibit per shift. Socialize with family and other members away from the exhibit area so visitor access is not discouraged by a crowd. Watch standers should be able to answer questions about new style life jackets.

Exhibits must have **“approachability”** to attract visitors to get our messages out. To achieve “approachability” when staffing exhibits this author recommends wearing the ODU uniform and as permitted by the Auxiliary Manual “when considered appropriate replace the insignia of their current or highest past office with the member device.” We wear member insignia when working side-by-side with Coast Guard personnel, and similar reasoning applies to exhibits. That is because venue visitors relate better to “members” rather than those mistaken for military officers. This view is not to belittle anyone’s achievements. It is to attract exhibit visitors and save lives through education. One Auxiliarist staffing the exhibit should wear an inflatable life jacket, and the other a belt pack to show off both styles. Wearing a life jacket with a Tropical blue long or dress uniform can damage shoulder boards, ribbons, and looks awkward.



Exhibits using a front “barrier” table are outdated, ineffective, and should be avoided. An open front encourages visitor access. This change in concept may be difficult for some to accept. Exhibits should be effective not inflexible if you are going to get results. Remember, for the past 10 years, 90 percent of drowning fatalities were not wearing life jackets so change is needed. Design an open “L” shaped exhibit to draw visitors in to engage them. Invite them to try on life jackets.

Encouraging boaters to wear life jackets is the primary objective so a colorful life jacket display should be the main thing people see. Display automatic and manual inflatable, inherently buoyant and children’s life jackets in bright colors. A life jacket display stand is easy to fabricate from “cow pen” wire sold for about \$27 at most feed stores. It is 16’ long by 4’ wide made of galvanized rods with 1’ squares and can be cut in half to make two 4’ x 8’ tall sections. Several years ago, each District Operation Boat Smart Coordinator received a life jacket selection. If it is not available, contact a local retailer and borrow their newest life jackets in each category. Most are accommodating about letting you borrow a few choice designs, especially if they know you will tell visitors where they came from. D5 Outreach Product Fulfillment Center (OPFC), operated by D5 prevention has several striking pull up displays. They cost about \$150 each and anyone can piggyback on the contract. With a pull up on both sides of the colorful life jacket display, you have an eye-catching exhibit that will attract volume business.



Display life jackets using coat hangers and encourage visitors to try them on. Orally inflate an inflatable life jacket on a visitor to demonstrate how buoyant they are when worn. Do not display old style over the head types, only new types in different styles and colors. Secure



life jackets when the exhibit is not staffed. An inexpensive 1/8” steel cable with loops on both ends can easily be fabricated with materials from a hardware store. Attach a card to each life jacket so those staffing the exhibit can answer questions about type, price, and source; and ensure they read the article “Inflatable Life Jacket Basics.” Use selected Auxiliary National Supply Center (ANSC) literature to round out the exhibit.

Engage visitors as soon as they come into your space. You can then inquire about their interests, and guide them to materials they might like to have. A good opening line is “do you do much boating?” NOT “do you own a boat?” DO NOT ignore visitors even if you are busy.

Posters can be taped to foam boards or stronger materials for more durable freestanding tabletop displays. Include a list (in large print) of mandatory and recommended VSC items for 16-21’ boats (most common). If you display a boating course book, secure it to the board with a wire. The flare gun cartridges displayed are inert and so marked. Post your flotilla’s boating course and VSC schedule; and have sign-up forms for both available. Display no more than three panels to avoid crowding.



Most people like to see symmetry and order that is why displays work much better and attract more people if items are organized. Visual clutter is avoided by using literature racks or individual plastic holders that can be purchased from an office supply store. Using individual holders also permits displaying brochures in front of related posters on each panel. Have recruiting brochures in front of the recruiting poster (or if the third panel is America’s Waterway Watch, AWW brochures), life jacket brochures mounted on the life jacket display rack, etc. This also frees space for other brochures in the ANSC #9018 -series literature racks. Limited decals or oversize items should be neatly stacked on the table. Do not use outdated materials.

The ANSC 3026-series America’s Waterway Watch materials (pamphlet and sticker) appeal to patriotic instinct. If you have a boating enthusiast, the Boat Responsibly brochure is excellent because it is encompassing. The U.S. Aids to Navigation System brochure (2009 revision - ANSC 3021) is an informative mini boating course.

Do not hand out literature to everyone and do not fill bags with literature to hand to visitors. Even if the literature is potentially interesting, thrusting unwanted literature at visitors is offensive. Your exhibit should not be a contest to see who can give away the most. Why, because literature costs money and if a visitor is burdened with unwanted literature it winds up in the nearest trashcan or worse. Most visitors only want selected items related to their interests.

Boat show exhibits offer an excellent opportunity to sell knot tying CD-ROMs, Davis cards, and teaching GPS for Mariners Courses to earn revenue for a flotilla. How about signing up students for About Boating Safely classes and selling them the textbook before to study now?

Some owners of 26' or larger boats are not aware of the requirement for an oil pollution and garbage placard to be displayed on-board. They particularly appreciate receiving ANSC #4064 Placard FWPIA Oil Pollution and #4067 Sticker Garbage Dumping Restrictions Offshore (or #4068 for the Great Lakes, or #4069 in Spanish or #4070 in Vietnamese). Providing these free decals is an excellent icebreaker and lead-in to scheduling the boat owner for a VSC.

There are also decals ANSC #4063 Reporting Marine Pollution and #3020 VHF - Emergency Radio Call Procedures, which are popular with off shore and Great Lakes boaters. In addition, it is a good idea to have some CG recruiting literature available at the exhibit.

Exhibit security is always a concern and attendants should be alert for shoplifters. Items should be secured at night. That means extra work but it will also avoid problems, especially if you are displaying borrowed items. Use empty CO2 cartridges for any inflatable life jackets displayed or worn, or remove the cartridge to preclude pranksters from inflating them.

Maintaining a Watch Log provides a record of who staffed the exhibit for reporting; what was sold for accountability; inquiries received so they can be responded to, or even the number of meaningful contacts for an after action report. It also provides information so subsequent watch standers know what occurred on previous shifts. A correctly maintained log would show where items stored for security the night prior can be found or where additional literature is stored. Regardless of advance planning and best intentions, there may still be some who arrive to stand watch in the incorrect uniform or not understanding the new operating ground rules. The logbook would be a good place to have this guide and Exhibit Operating Procedure available for them to read. Also, include contact information, lock combinations, and numbers.

Auxiliary National Supply Center (ANSC) items are ordered by the FSO-MA from ANSC by snail mailing or faxing an order form to them. These order forms can be found in the back of the ANSC catalog. There is a series of pre completed order forms where the requestor only has to enter quantity but there is one blank order form as well. What frequently occurs is a new item will be announced via e-mail or on the Auxiliary Member's What's New Page but it will not yet be listed on one of the order forms. All the FSO-MA needs to do is write in the item on the bottom of one of the forms, use the blank form, or even attach a piece of paper to a form.

Brochures and pamphlets have maximum ordering quantity limits. When more than the maximum is needed, include a short justification. For example, "Needed for the Jones Boat Show with estimated attendance of 5,000; or needed to stock 10 marine dealers in the Spring. When ordering, keep in mind one event Marketing handled for the past four years averaged 30-35,000 visitors over three days but we gave away less than 300 of the most popular item (#3006 Federal Boating Regulations), and usually 100 or less of the other items. Order enough for the event and justify the larger amount on the form. These materials are free to your flotilla but cost the Coast Guard money to produce and ship. Plan for the anticipated crowd but avoid waste.

Visit <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg3/cg3pcx/publications/misc/DCAT.pdf> for the ANSC catalog. If you cannot access the catalog that way, go to [www.cgaux.org](http://www.cgaux.org), select "Members", then on the left side select "Chief Dir of Auxiliary", then on the left select "Manuals and Publications", then select "Manuals" : and scroll down to "ANSC 2009 ANSC Catalog."



**Prior planning** is always a good idea because some items can be out of stock, especially at the end/beginning of a new fiscal year. Here are other sources for free literature:

BoatUS Foundation has several good brochures on their web site that has an order form (<http://www.boatus.com/foundation/brochure/default.htm>). Their telephone number is (703) 823-9550 X3200. Up to 200 each of several brochures, to include bilingual materials can be ordered. Allow several weeks for shipment. Their materials include:

FD009 Hey Kids, Lets Go Boating (w/stickers)  
 FD010 Life Jackets (in English and Spanish)  
 FD011 Alcohol and Boating (in English and Spanish)  
 FD015 Boat Handling Decal

Personal Watercraft Industry Association (PWIA) provides their “Riding Rules for Personal Watercraft” brochure. Phone: (202) 737-9768 or email [info@pwia.org](mailto:info@pwia.org)

Everyone likes to receive something for free. Sources of free boating promotional items are Coast Guard recruiters (pens, pencils, rulers, decals, refrigerator magnets), State Boating Law Administrators (floating key rings, whistles, PWC registration tubes), US Army Corps of Engineers (orange trash bags which double as a visual distress signal, coloring books, and whistles). Although available from other services, only use Coast Guard recruiting materials.

The National Marketing Group is available to assist flotillas with exhibits and advice. Contact Special Events Manager Stu Soffer for assistance at [cgaugstu@yahoo.com](mailto:cgaugstu@yahoo.com).

Sample EXHIBIT OPERATING PROCEDURE  
*(Modify for local use)*

1. Exhibit Goal: Promote recreational boating safety by encouraging boaters to wear life jackets, take the Auxiliary About Boating Safely Course, and obtain a vessel safety check. Simultaneously recruit and promote America’s Waterway Watch Program.
2. Concept: The concept for a successful exhibit is for visitors to be able to relate to watch standers as “affable” as opposed to “authority” figures, or “approachability.” Watch standers must be knowledgeable, physically able to perform exhibit duties and wear the designated uniform smartly.
3. Setting Up: Include specific set up, break down and nighttime security information here. Remember, free exhibit space sometimes does not include a carpet. Many venues rent them. If your exhibit space is carpeted, or you bring your own carpet, it has to be cleaned daily so think about a vacuum cleaner or broom. Having electricity also costs money at most boat shows.
4. Operating the Exhibit:
  - a. Only two watch standers should staff the exhibit at one time. Socialize with family and other members away from the exhibit area so visitor access is not blocked or discouraged.

b. The ODU uniform with member insignia is designated and hats are not worn under cover. Key rings, knives, or other non-uniform items should not be worn on belts or hooked to belt loops. Gold chains or other inappropriate jewelry should not be worn in view. It is always a good idea to review the Auxiliary Manual on uniform and accessory wear policies before meeting the public.

c. Encouraging the boating public to wear "today's" life jackets is a primary objective, so you wearing a new style life should be the first thing people see when they enter our exhibit space. One of those staffing the exhibit should wear a PV/PE/VE inflatable life jacket and the other a belt pack to show off both styles. The inflatable life jacket pouch is an ideal place for cell telephones and car keys, pen and pad, sunglasses, etc.

d. Event access passes must be returned to the "Will Call" booth upon completion of each shift. They must be available for the shift subsequent to the one that relieves you.

e. Engage visitors as soon as they come into your space, inquire about their boating interests, and guide them to materials they might like to have. The America's Waterway Watch pamphlet appeals to patriotic instinct. If you have a boating enthusiast, the "You're In Command" boat responsibly brochure is good because it is encompassing. Do not tell "sea stories."

f. Don't hand literature to everyone. Even if the literature is potentially interesting, thrusting unwanted literature at visitors is offensive. Do not pre-bag literature for visitors. This is a waste of literature. Let visitors select or ask for what they want or you can suggest items.

g. Ensure all are wearing the uniform of the day correctly before taking photographs. This is especially important if a photo is going to be published in a newspaper, magazine or on a web site. One frequently overlooked item is wearing a hat under cover or prohibited items on belts.

h. Watch standers are required to log in and out in the Watch Stander's Log. Record the location of any items secured for the night, literature out of stock, contacts to be followed up on, estimated number of meaningful contacts for each shift and any other pertinent information.

#### 4. Be Professional and Effective:

a. Don't Sit. If you sit, visitors get the impression you do not care to be bothered. Use the stools provided to rest because they permit eye contact to be maintained. No chairs please.

b. Neatness. Tabletops should be kept neat and orderly. Do not place hats, jackets, water bottles and other personal items on them. Store all items not in use out of sight.

c. Don't Read or Text Message. For every 10' of linear exhibit space, you have just four seconds to impress a visitor enough to get them to stop.

d. Don't Chew Gum or Tobacco. No one wants to talk with someone who is chewing.

e. Don't Eat or Smoke: Take a break. Remember, garlic, onions, and some foods cause unpleasant breath as does tobacco. Carry breath mints or other breath cleansers. Some

mouthwash products contain alcohol and can give the false impression the user consumed alcohol.

f. Don't Ignore Prospects. One of the rudest things you can do is ignore a visitor, even for a few seconds. Nobody likes to be ignored. If you are busy, when someone approaches at least acknowledge him or her, and subsequently try to include them in the conversation.