

Newspaper Article 16: Safety Briefings

Boarding an airliner assures that we will get a safety briefing before we take to the air. Further, so as not to miss anything, the flight attendant either reads the briefing or has it memorized. Nowadays, it usually is recorded – guaranteeing that no part of the briefing is left out.

Airlines do this for a reason. They want us to know what to do in an emergency and how to prevent us taking action that will harm ourselves or other passengers.

Now let's look at boating. Most briefings that I have heard sound something like this, "Watch your step and put the cooler over there." There is a better way to ensure our passengers a safe and comfortable ride.

Here is what my wife Jane and I do every time we have passengers aboard. We have perfected the procedure over fifteen years of boating, of which eight were live- aboard years. We had lots of passengers!

We call for a safety meeting before engine start. That is, everyone aboard gets together and pays attention.

Here are the items we cover:

1. Give each passenger a life jacket. Instruct them to put it on and adjust it to fit. Then, have them place the jacket somewhere on the boat where they can get to it quickly. If someone can't swim, suggest they wear the jacket all the time. If there are minors aboard legally required to wear a jacket, they must wear one all the time.

2. Show where the fire extinguishers are located and, briefly, how they operate.

3. If there are "don't do" items, tell passengers about them up front. Ours is "no smoking".

4. Choose a couple of passengers (or crew) to be lookouts and report to the captain anything they see that looks like a danger to us. (Change this assignment frequently as it can become tedious.)

5. Show them around the boat. If there is a 'head', show them how it works.

6. Tell them that before the captain adds power he/she will say, "Power coming up." Likewise, when power is reduced, the announcement will be "Power coming back." On hearing either announcement, everyone aboard should grab some part of the boat that will increase their stability. (Prevents many spills and man-overboard (MOB) situations.

7. Provide instructions on what to do if they witness a MOB. They should immediately shout MAN OVERBOARD and point to the MOB, never losing sight of the MOB. If possible, a throwable life saving cushion should be thrown to the MOB. Even if it can't be thrown very far, it is something for the MOB to swim to.

If there are many passengers and particularly if they are children, the old "buddy" system works great. Each person has a buddy and keeps track of that buddy. If the buddy disappears, SHOUT!

8. Tell the passengers that there are no dumb questions, so speak up if ANYTHING bothers them.

This simple pre-departure safety briefing takes but about five minutes, if you're wordy.

Fiddle with this briefing so it makes sense for you, your boat and your crew. Then type it up (that's called a checklist) and use it. Your passengers will NOT think you corny! They will think, "Cool, here is a captain who is thoughtful and attentive to our concerns, and I feel good about having him/her in command."