

Newspaper Article 20: Weather

We have all heard the phrase, "If you don't like the current weather, just wait awhile, it will change". True, true! And it's those changes that we need to pay attention to.

Not many years ago weather forecasting was inaccurate, slow and not very localized. No longer! With some exceptions, weather forecasting is very accurate, especially violent bad weather conditions. Radio, TV, the Internet, our newspapers all have weather information vital to our enjoyment of boating. All we need to do is pay attention. If you have a marine radio, it has special channels for local weather that is VERY accurate, up-to-date, and localized for our area.

Let's look at a weather scenario on our lake. It's Monday and you and your crew think it a great idea to go on a cruise up to the Russell dam next Saturday. Since the trip is recreational, there is no compelling reason to do it if the weather is bad. Here is a technique you might want to use.

Set up a series of times to make go-no-go decisions. On Monday, you look at the long range weather forecast for the next weekend. You note that there is a warm front approaching from the west. Warm fronts mean cloudy, humid days with possibility of rain. This one should hit our lake by Thursday. Then, we know that front will be followed by a cold front – just as sure as God makes little green apples! A cold front is often preceded by a very windy leading edge (called a roll cloud).

You decide that the trip is still a go. On Wednesday the warm front is still on its way and predicted to arrive on Thursday and depart by Saturday – it's a fast one! So the trip is still a go.

On Thursday the warm front arrives, and the forecast is still for it to depart on Saturday. You can still give this a go signal but tomorrow will tell the tale. Friday evening the warm front is about thru and the forecast is for the cold front to arrive on Saturday. Go or no-go? It's iffy, but looks like a go. It's the usual cold front's wind that is the question. You awake Saturday morning to a beautiful clear day – with winds approaching 30 MPH! Being prudent and not self-destructive, you declare a no-go; BUT Sunday looks perfect so you simply delay your cruise one day.

Making go-no-go decisions also helps us once we are on the water. Often we have a perfect day but with the threat of wide spread thunderstorms. You do NOT want to be on the water in one of those things!! If you see one coming – you can hear the thunder and see dark clouds approaching, usually out of the south or west – make a beeline for shore. Any shore. If you can't get back to your dock, just pull ashore anyplace and wait out the storm. Thunderstorms are usually quick. If you are caught in your boat, put on your life jacket and stay low in the boat. Put out the anchor or, using power, head into the wind and waves at a 45 degree angle. Prayer helps!

When Jane and I were cruising in the Bahamas in our powerboat and saw a thunderstorm coming we usually tried to anchor close by a sail boat with a high mast – but that's another story.

Learn more about weather and other boating topics by attending one of the Coast Guard Auxiliary/Corps of Engineers boating safety classes.