



BOAT OWNERS: Your responsibilities in the event the unthinkable happens to your boat



by Member **RICK BLACK**

In May, I received a call from a friend who lives in Connecticut, but has waterfront property on Point Judith Pond. He was calling from Connecticut saying that he had just received word that his boat was sinking at his dock in front of his Rhode Island house! He asked me what he should do. I told him to call the Harbormaster and BoatUS.

I hung up and immediately headed to his place to find the boat sunk, listing badly to starboard, and surrounded by a sheen of oil.

I, too called the Harbormaster, as my friend had not actually spoken to him. I then called U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) Station Point Judith. The dispatcher said he needed to have the *Officer of the Day* call me back, which he did shortly thereafter.

Ironically, the responding USCG unit came out of East Providence, RI via the highways and not the waterways, arriving about 30 minutes later.

My friend also contacted his insurer regarding the salvage as well as how to best handle the twin diesels, which had both been underwater. He obviously wanted to mitigate further damage from the corrosive effects of salt water. He was immediately contacted by their adjuster. TowBoatUS was contacted to handle the salvage operation.

The Harbormaster had contacted the RIDEM, which also arrived via truck, but did come equipped with an oil boom set-up, which he deployed to contain oil from the engines and bilge. The full fuel tank, thank goodness, was not leaking.

I also notified the Fire Department, but I was told that the agencies I had already contacted were better-equipped than they

were. Their on-the-water response is primarily for fire and life-threatening situations.

The gentleman from DEM contacted the National Response Center. The local police also showed up after being contacted by the Harbormaster.

The boat was easily refloated after one of the crew of TowBoatUS donned a wetsuit and mask to plug the scuppers and engine exhausts, before engaging one of their large gas-powered pumps. They, too, also deployed an oil boom.

The cause of the sinking was a broken glass intake strainer. Although the boat was connected to shore power and equipped with two bilge pumps, apparently the pumps could not keep up with the inflow of water.

The boat was towed to a Wakefield marina to be hauled. The boat's insurer did, in fact, declare the 28-foot sport fishing vessel a total loss.

The point of this story is that a boat owner has the responsibility of contacting or making sure the various agencies (Harbormaster, DEM, USCG, National Resource Center, and Police) and salvager are contacted. Getting the boat

salvaged and the oil contained is paramount!

While all of these agencies were contacted, the boat owner, nonetheless, had to sign a USCG document that stated he was responsible for the clean-up and salvage along with the proper notifications, or be subject to a \$50,000 fine.

The boat owner was assured, based on what the lead "Coasty" was witnessing, that he was doing everything correctly.



The 28' boat was declared a total loss

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