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– *Another "Boat Responsibly!" Reminder from the United States Coast Guard* –

## **Knowing How a Boat Handles Can Help Avoid Collisions**

“I’ve been piloting boats since before I could walk!” Maybe so – but no matter how experienced you may be as a boater, it’s worth paying attention to the handling characteristics of every boat you own or operate. Every boat – even boats of the same type, from the same manufacturer – handles differently. Your own boat responds differently from day to day as a result of weather, current, temperature, load, and other factors.

The boater who ignores handling characteristics is risking his safety. Coast Guard data show that “collision with another vessel” is the number one type of recreational boating accident; “collision with a fixed object” is second.

If you’re interested in the technical factors that influence handling characteristics – things like side force, frictional wake current, and drag – a review of one of the many boat handling and seamanship publications, or the specifications supplied with your boat, will provide a wealth of useful information. But in the meantime, there are simple steps that the U.S. Coast Guard recommends that every boater – including experienced boaters – go over as a matter of routine.

### **Drill It In**

Whether you’ve been operating a particular boat for three years or three minutes, it’s a good idea to try some drills related to boat handling. Pick an open area on a calm day. Practice turning, stopping, and reversing course at various speeds, and pay attention to your turning radius, stopping distance, and maneuverability when the boat has more or less momentum.

Later, try the same drills in rougher water, with more wind, and with more or less weight in the boat. You may be surprised how much these variables can change the way your boat handles. At a minimum, these drills should be conducted on an annual basis, especially if you live in an area of the country where your boat is stored during the winter. Once your boat has been launched for the summer boating season, take some time to reacquaint yourself with your vessel’s handling characteristics.

### **A Weighty Issue**

Do you know how much you weigh? Not trying to ask personal questions – but as the boat owner or operator, it’s important that you know the total weight of the equipment and persons you bring on board, and make sure that it’s within the limits listed on your boat’s capacity plate (if one is provided). You must take into consideration everything you’ve taken on board, such as fishing gear, a cooler, water (eight pounds per gallon), food, and fuel (six pounds per gallon). Exceeding your boat’s rated capacity is dangerous and can severely affect safe handling.

Even if you’re within the appropriate weight limit for your vessel, that weight must be properly distributed. Power trim and trim tabs are useful tools – but it’s better to carefully balance weight fore an

aft, port and starboard, to avoid listing or “porpoising” – both of which make handling a vessel more difficult.

### **NOAA News is Good News**

Finally, check the weather before you go out – and not just to find out whether or not you’ll need a sweater. Wind and waves, in particular, can drastically change a boat’s handling characteristics. Take a few minutes to listen to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) marine forecast on your VHF radio, even if it’s currently bright and sunny. You’ll be much better off making the conscious decision not to pilot your boat in 30-mile-per-hour winds than accidentally finding out you’re incapable of it. For further information on NOAA, check out <http://www.noaa.gov>.

Yes, you may be an experienced boater, but even if you were born with tiller in hand, it’s worth taking a little extra time to make sure you’ve mastered the handling of *this* boat on *this* day under *these* conditions.

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*The U.S. Coast Guard reminds all boaters to “Boat Responsibly!” For more tips on boating safety, visit [www.USCGboating.org](http://www.USCGboating.org).*