

Rescue Techniques – working from boats Practical guided demonstrations

“You are not a survivor until you have been rescued” is an old but true adage, and small boat rescue recovery techniques are often the bridge that makes the vital difference to saving a life successfully from in water



These practical guided demonstration sessions will allow the workshop attendee to view the rescues being carried out and have a dialogue about the specialist techniques with the currently qualified demonstrator practitioners from the fast rescue boat sphere – techniques applicable for all small craft. The craft used will be RIBs, rigid buoyancy boats or FRBs (fast rescue boat). These sessions scheduled for the Ocean Village Marina water basin have never before been carried out at a UK water rescue conference.

The session will start by being introduced to all the various types of small boat rescue devices currently in use, they vary in size and style quite dramatically and require different methods of handling techniques. Also the “launch”, deployment and recovery procedures can differ greatly between vessels and sometimes a single boat may have more than one form of rescue/recovery system.

The aim is to assist in the personal development of the attendee’s knowledge and consideration of techniques for use of these apparatus in an environment where discussion aids this process from the experiences of the demonstrators as well as being given written technical information (insofar as this is possible).

Learners should come equipped with and wear for the sessions, as minimum – suitable outdoor clothing for the prevailing climatic conditions and or correct PPE for the water environment or coveralls and lifejackets. All will be briefed on the relevant risk assessments to work within; all have to comply with these requirements. Groups will be formed of appropriate size and handed to dedicated tutors; groups may be rotated with different tutors.

Self-rescue onto a craft from a “capsize” position will be first. Having located and checked to see that

your fellow crew are OK, you must decide who is going to do what. The first job is to make your way via the grab handles to the stern of the boat. A quoit is usually stowed on the aft end of the port tube, so one crewmember must free this and position themselves a safe distance from the craft; the second crew then approaches and activates the self righting bag by pulling a handle on the transom, releasing gas for the bag to inflate. He/she then positions him/herself with the first crewman while the boat rights herself. A self righting boat, due to the dynamic forces required to right a boat, is violent, it is therefore important to make sure you are not too close or too far away from the vessel.

Too close is obvious, but too far could mean you are at the limit of the quoit line, so when the boat does right you run the risk of injury due to those forces. The next job is to board. The easiest place is next to the outboard in the stern, taking care not to go over the engine, it could still be very hot. Enter the boat and deploy the sea anchor if sea states dictate.

As we will discuss, there are a number of checks that must be carried out prior to launch. Integrity of the hull, inflation and state of the sponsons, navigation and communication equipment working and drive systems are clear etc. Once it has been decided by the coxswain that the boat is seaworthy, although having the potential for being an extremely hazardous task, careful training and regular practice can make launching a simple routine affair, but this relies on teamwork and all the crew being confident and conversant throughout – with the coxswain remaining in charge and vigilant.

Drive systems vary, their differing qualities affect handling – both jet and prop systems. In essence going ahead in both types requires similar handling –

turn to port to go to port. In detail a jet however requires a slightly different approach. Once mastered, jets open up a whole new world of handling.

We will discuss different search patterns and the different states we are likely to encounter while doing so and their resultant effects. Many people may be surprised to know, that having found your casualty alive, your very pulling him from the water could be fatal. A now well-documented killer is something called Hydro Static Shock. This occurs when a person has been in the water for some time. For those of you who have felt their lower bodies being squeezed by the water when wading have experienced part of its cause. As we have already seen, when cold, the body pools blood around the vital organs, this is further assisted by the water pressure and reduction of gravity. If you then turn up and yank the person out of the water vertically, you will probably kill them, as when the body is returned to its natural gravitational atmosphere, all the blood drains out of the organs causing massive internal collapse – Hydro Static Shock.

To combat this wherever possible it is best to try to recover someone horizontally. There are a number of ways of doing this: by use of a stretcher; Jason’s Cradle; ‘Dacon Ladder’; or recovery net. All are simple to use and effective and if these are not available, tube deflation on an inflatable sponson is an option. What are the options if no specialist equipment? We will look at ‘back to the boat’ recovery pros and cons. What to do ‘in extremis’ and where to put the casualty on a small vessel, crew positions and so on.

Approaching different types of craft needs special considerations eg, ‘TEMSECS’ (totally enclosed marine survival craft). Unlike an inshore lifeboat if a tow situation arises, a man is put on board to secure the tow, the FRB should not to get too close to the ship’s lifeboat at all, this may seem strange until you consider that there may be a dozens of scared, sick passengers on board and seeing an empty rescue boat might prove to be too tempting, people may jump and try to board your boat. The method is to hold a distance that communication can be maintained and a tow rope thrown, instruct persons on board to secure their tow to a sound fixture and if required stream the sea anchor aft.

We’ve deliberately avoided writing “how to”, as we’ll discuss techniques at the time – look forward to seeing you there! ●

This report compiled by Lane, Jefferies and Associates.