Coast Guard Warns: Prepare For Winter Storms

Local News

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With severe weather approaching and forecasts of strong winds and heavy surf, the Coast Guard reminds boaters and beach-goers to be prepared and stay aware; and reminds mariners to take the necessary steps to ensure that their boats are properly secured.

“During the fall and winter storms in this region, the Coast Guard receives several reports of vessels adrift in Puget Sound, Washington and Oregon coasts. These adrift vessels not only represent a possible loss of property for the owners, they are significant hazards to navigation and pose a serious environmental threat as chemicals and fuels onboard can spill should the vessels break apart,” said Capt. David Klipp, 13th Coast Guard District’s Chief of Response. “Coast Guard crews are also put at risk when responding to these boats in rough waters.”

Boaters, beach-goers and those living in areas with a potential for flooding should follow these guidelines to ensure their safety:

Watch the weather forecast closely and pay attention to small craft advisories issued by the National Weather Service. Small craft advisory conditions are dangerous to even the most seasoned professional mariner in the most seaworthy vessels.

Exercise extreme caution on beaches and jetties: Sudden, powerful waves can engulf the entire beach, knocking people down or throwing them violently against nearby rocks. Once in the water, strong currents can pull people out to sea. Beachgoers should also stay away from driftwood floating in the water or resting on shore. Logs can weigh several tons and can quickly be picked up by an unexpected wave and tossed onto people. Jetties are also dangerous due to unstable surfaces and slippery conditions. Large gaps in jetty structures can also trap people who slip and fall while walking on the rocks. Be aware of rising tides - high tides can trap people on rock formations and in coves. Always let someone know where you are going, walk with a buddy and be weather and surf aware.

If it has been raining hard for several hours, or steadily raining for several days, be alert to the possibility of a flood.

Minimize contact with flood water - Standing water from flooding can carry diseases and hazardous chemicals. If you get your water from a well and water floods into your pump house - check to see if water from the ground went down your well. If so, or if you're not sure, boil your water before using it for drinking or cooking for yourself or your pets. If water floods your septic system, minimize your use of water for washing and wait for the water level to drop. If you come in contact with standing water, wash carefully before you eat or drink.

Assemble a disaster preparedness kit - a good disaster kit should include: a first aid kit and essential medications, canned food and a can opener, at least three gallons of water per person, protective clothing, rain gear, and bedding or sleeping bags, battery-powered radio, flashlight, and extra batteries, special items for infants, elderly, or disabled family members, written instructions for how to turn off electricity, gas and water if authorities advise you to do so (remember, you'll need a

professional to turn them back on.)
Stay high and dry - move to higher ground away from rivers, streams, creeks, and storm drains. Do not drive around barricades, they are there for your safety. If your car stalls in rapidly rising waters, abandon it immediately and climb to higher ground.
Vessel owners should take the following precautions to assure their vessels are secure:

Cover your boat: Heavy rains can flood boats and even cause sinking in extreme cases. Protect your boat and be sure your vessel is adequately covered when it is moored up to prevent flooding. If you can't bring your boat onto shore, make sure it is securely fastened to its dock. Vessels that break free from their moorings can become a hazard to navigation and endanger the lives of those who must retrieve them.
Check all of your anchor and mooring lines. Double the lines up for added strength. Ensure all lines and tackle are in good condition.
Ensure you have a storm anchor. The anchor that comes with a boat is often inadequate for the storms in the Pacific Northwest. An improper or inadequate anchor can cause your boat to drift and may lead to unnecessary search-and-rescue calls.
Small boats should be removed from the water and moved to a secure location well above tidal and flood areas to ensure they are not washed out to sea.
Ensure boat registration numbers are updated with correct owner information. Consider keeping owner contact information on vessel itself. With this information, agencies responding to adrift vessels can promptly return the vessel to its owner.
If you are going to be underway, you should take the following precautions:

Wear Personal Floatation Devices: Life jackets - bring one for each person. History has shown that the chance of survival greatly increases if an individual is wearing a personal floatation device. For more information on life jacket requirements visit:
http://www.uscgboating.org/command/initiative/jacket.htm
Have a Marine Radio: Investing in a good VHF radio is a smart purchase. Cell phones should not be used as a primary means of emergency communication on the water where reception may be poor or unavailable. A VHF radio has a strong signal and distress calls are received by everyone monitoring a VHF radio in range, whereas cell phone communications are point-to-point. Use VHF Channel 16 for emergencies.
For more in-depth information about radios and terminology visit the link below.
http://www.uscgboating.org/safety/metlife/radio.htm
Float Plan: A float plan is a written statement of the details of an intended voyage usually filed with a friend, neighbor and/or marina operator or; a document that specifically describes the vessel, equipment, crew, and itinerary of a planned voyage. Leave a copy with a friend, relative or local marina before heading out on the water. If a vessel has an emergency or is overdue, pertinent information will be available to provide local marine police or the Coast Guard. If delayed, boaters should inform those with the float plan, and be sure to notify them upon returning so the float plan can be "closed out" and an unnecessary and costly search avoided. An example of a float plan can be found at http://www.uscgboating.org/safety/fedreqs/floatplan.pdf.
For a detailed coastal weather forecast, click the National Weather Service link for your area:

Western Washington - http://www.weather.gov/seattle or
http://www.ndbc.noaa.gov/data/Forecasts/FZUS56.KPQR.html

South Washington/Central/Northern Oregon Coasts - http://www.weather.gov/portland

South Oregon Coast - http://www.weather.gov/medford or
http://www.ndbc.noaa.gov/data/Forecasts/FZUS56.KPQR.html