

# **Pelagic Sailing Club**

## **Safety & Seamanship Workshop**

### **First Aid when Suddenly in Command**

What would you do if you found yourself suddenly in command when the skipper is incapacitated? The skipper would certainly like to believe that the crew could make the right decisions and take the right actions to get proper medical care and to get the boat home safely.

However even before calling for help the crew should stabilize a situation and to find out where the boat is located. Now that most boats have GPS systems on, hopefully the crew can at least communicate the latitude and longitude to the Coast Guard. The next step of course is using the VHF radio. Some boats have an emergency calling guide next to the main ship radio. The emergency DSC button operation is also becoming more readily available.

Here some thoughts about how to react if the skipper were incapacitated:

- Make the situation as safe as possible
  - Get the injured person in a safe location
  - Check to ensure the airway is clear, they are breathing and have good blood circulation
  - If there is head, neck or spine injury prevent any movement
  - If they are conscious try to find out if they have any allergies are taking any medications and where appropriate information is located
- Making the boat safe is right up there with the first things you have to do
  - Reduce or remove sails
  - Determine your position relative to obstacles and other boats
  - Take appropriate actions to keep the boat and the rest of the crew safe
- Determine the location of the boat, the direction of travel and the speed
- Call the Coast Guard on VHF channel 16 and/or press and hold the DSC button for 5 seconds until it transmits an automatic distress call
- Inform the Coast Guard about the situation
  - Boat location, number of people on board and the nature of the distress
  - You need to balance giving complete medical information without taking too much time
  - They will ask you to put on lifejackets and to keep the radio on for communications
  - Follow their instructions while keeping the patient and the boat safe
- Head towards the nearest safe harbor or to a location as agreed with the Coast Guard

The next part of the equation is to get the boat back to the home port or other safe location

- The crew needs to navigate and control the boat safely while attending medical needs
- After the injured person is evacuated the crew would still need to secure the boat
  - Return to a safe and secure mooring/dock
  - Tie the boat up safely
  - Turn off the engine, instruments and batteries as appropriate
  - Secure the sails, sail cover, lines, equipment, hatches, close & lock the boat
  - Communicate with the Marina and skipper (or his family) of the actions you have taken