America's Boating Club

Birmingham Squadron

A Note from Birmingham Squadron

Prevent Electrical Shock and Death on Your Boat

A small inland lake near Phoenix, Arizona probably seems like a galaxy far, far away from Birmingham Squadron members, but an incident there reminds us of an important element of boating safety.

On Sunday, July 12, EMS and Police units were called to Lake Pleasant Regional Park where they found five victims suffering electrical shock in the water. Once the current had been turned off, of the five, two were in critical condition, two were generally OK and, unfortunately, one person died. The culprit, apparently, was a stray electrical current at the dock where boaters were swimming.

This incident should be a warning to all boaters and marina operators that no one should swim around boats in marinas. While not a factor in this tragedy, it also should remind us to take safety steps if we are around boats generating AC electrical current.

Don't swim around docks or boats using AC electrical current. Swim at least 50 yards away from docks – preferably in areas marked as safe.[i]

If you are a boat owner, have your boat inspected by an electrician with current ABYC (American Boat and Yacht Council) Electrical Certification or by an ABYC Certified Technician. Boats with alternating current (AC) systems should have isolation transformers or equipment leakage circuit interrupter (ELCI) protection, comply with American Boat and Yacht Council (ABYC) standards, and should be serviced by an ABYC Certified® Technician

Talk to Marina owners or operators about the danger of electric shock drowning. Ask them to install GFCI's on all shore power pedestals and on all marina wiring circuits. Ask if they are having their marinas regularly inspected by qualified electricians who are familiar with National Fire Protection Association Codes: NFPA 303 and NFPA 70.

Do Not Rely on "Green Light Devices"

So what are "green light devices?" They are products intended to alert one to the presence of electricity in the water. They detect and measure voltages that appear where they're not supposed to (like in the water near a dock). They are considered "green light devices" when used to indicate by some visual means (such as a green indicator) that it's safe to enter or be in the water; and by some form of visual and audible indication when it is not.

These alarm systems create a false sense of safety when used as a "swimming green light" and are of serious to concern to the ESDPA. These alarm devices are reactive in nature; not predictive. They don't warn of impending danger; they indicate only that the danger exists.

Participate in Safe Boating Education

America's **Boating Club®** provides courses on a broad range of safe boating subjects, including **Marine Electrical Systems. Birmingham Squadron's** own Bob Blau teaches this course, among others, and Birmingham stands ready to teach any course offered if students are interested. Go to our web site at bpsd9.org for more information or to let us know what courses you wish to take.

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i Advice of the ELECTRIC SHOCK DROWNING PREVENTION ASSOCIATION