



## **Safety Thursday - Crew Overboard**

**June 27, 2013**

It is every sailor's nightmare - being lost overboard, particularly at night or in adverse conditions. Preventing a crew overboard (COB) (or man overboard - MOB) situation is the focus of many of the Mac Safety Regulations (MSR) - for example, MSR 13 (lifelines); MSR 40 (Jackstays); MSR 70 (Harnesses and Tethers); and others. The Cruising Club of America has a good briefing on preventing COB situations at [http://www.cruisingclub.org/pdfs/sas\\_dy\\_man\\_overboard\\_prevention.pdf](http://www.cruisingclub.org/pdfs/sas_dy_man_overboard_prevention.pdf).

We also encourage you to read the CCA's "Tips for the Victim" at [http://www.cruisingclub.org/pdfs/sas\\_dy\\_victim\\_tips\\_crew\\_overboard.pdf](http://www.cruisingclub.org/pdfs/sas_dy_victim_tips_crew_overboard.pdf). The most important point is: always have a PFD on. This dramatically enhances your chance of survival and recovery.

This safety thursday focuses on what happens when those prevention methods aren't sufficient and a crew member goes overboard. (All references are to monohull MSRs, but there are equivalent multihull ones). This article will discuss the MSRs applicable to helping in MOB situations, as well as a discussion of techniques that each crew should practice before they need it.

### Equipment

MSR 61 requires a man overboard pole and flag, with a lifebuoy, self-igniting light, a whistle and drogue attached and be ready for instant use. An inflatable MOB system such as the MOM-8A fulfills this requirement if properly serviced and equipped. Whether you choose inflatable or rigid, this device should be instantly deployed when a person goes overboard. It serves two main functions: (a) it provides flotation for the person in the water; and (b) it aids in locating the crew member, via light, sound and visual methods. Particularly in heavy

seas or at night, picking out a small human head amongst the waves is very challenging. A MOB pole or MOM-8A provides an easy-to-see target.

MSR 60 requires a Lifesling ([http://www.thesailingfoundation.org/new\\_lifesling.htm](http://www.thesailingfoundation.org/new_lifesling.htm)). A Lifesling consists of a flotation horseshoe attached to a floating line. A hoist and tackle system is an option. The Lifesling is used once the COB is located, to provide flotation and a method of returning them to the boat. See [http://www.cruisingclub.org/pdfs/safety\\_lifeline\\_prep\\_guide.pdf](http://www.cruisingclub.org/pdfs/safety_lifeline_prep_guide.pdf) An excellent video on the use of a Lifesling is available online and should be watched by all sailors:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnhjOhWD4j0>

MSR 63 requires a heaving line, readily accessible in the cockpit. This is another device that can be used to help bring a crew member back to the boat once they're located in the water. Do not underestimate the difficulty of recovery of a crew member even when the boat is close nearby. A COB will not be able to easily swim in an inflated PFD, or if injured - a heaving line will provide those on the boat with a mechanism for bringing the COB back to the boat.

Finally, MSR 76 requires a personal safety knife. This is useful to the person in the water when they are attached to the boat but don't want to be! For example, if tangled in rigging or being dragged along by their tether. We recommend you re-read last year's Safety Thursday on personal safety knives. ([http://www.cycracetomackinac.com/assets/1/7/Issue\\_8\\_-\\_Personal\\_Safety\\_Knives.pdf](http://www.cycracetomackinac.com/assets/1/7/Issue_8_-_Personal_Safety_Knives.pdf))

### Technique

The proper technique for MOB situations is beyond the scope of this article. However, here are some considerations. There are several methods for recovery. For a good overview, see this article: <http://www.sailingmagazine.net/how-to/technique/1371-crew-overboard-recovery.html>. ISAF Offshore Regulation D provides a good summary of the quick stop method (<http://www.sailing.org/tools/documents/OSR2012AppD09122011-%5b11754%5d.pdf>); the quick stop technique is strongly recommended in the MSRs.

No matter which technique you use for recovery, there are some common steps that should be taken upon recognition of a COB situation.

1. Shout Man Overboard and hit the MOB function on your chart plotter if at the helm.
2. Deploy the MOB pole or MOM-8A immediately, and get any other flotation possible in the water (to aid the victim and to provide a visual reference to where the COB occurred).
3. Assign one or more crew members to maintain eye contact with the victim and point at them constantly.
4. Call a Mayday on the VHF and/or depress the "distress" button if DSC equipped - a COB is a mayday situation in all but the calmest conditions, and even then it should be called as Pan Pan. All competitors should render appropriate aid as required by the Racing Rules of Sail and by law.

From there, boat handling depends on the method for COB recovery you choose. All techniques involve getting the boat slowed down, back to the victim, and stopped near the victim in order to allow for recovery. Your crew should have a discussion of which technique is appropriate. The "quick stop" method recommended in MSR74 is detailed above in linked

ISAF Offshore Special Regulation. We urge your crew, and particularly all your helmsmen, to have a discussion of what technique is appropriate for your boat and crew.

Once you get the crew member to the boat, getting them aboard can be a new challenge. Any victim will likely be in some level of shock, and an injured victim may not be able to help themselves. Additionally, getting a crew member on board a boat with high transom and sides may be challenging even if they are uninjured. Your crew should talk through how this would be done, and you should consider carrying a block and tackle to assist in Lifesling-aided recovery.

A final point: Do not go into the water to assist the person unless absolutely necessary. If the victim is unable to board or needs further assistance and someone must go into the water, make sure that person is wearing a PFD and is attached to the boat with a line.

#### Required Drill

Do not forget the requirements of MSR 72 - each crew must perform an annual MOB practice with at least two-thirds of the racing crew participating. A form certifying compliance must be downloaded, signed by the crew, and kept onboard in event of inspection on the Island. The MOB form can be downloaded from [http://www.cyracetomackinac.com/assets/1/7/2013\\_crew\\_overboard\\_cert.pdf](http://www.cyracetomackinac.com/assets/1/7/2013_crew_overboard_cert.pdf)

*Note: The purpose of this article is to highlight some of the Mac Safety Regulations and how your crew can race the Mac as safely as possible. As always, ultimate responsibility for the safety of the crew and the decision whether to race or to stop racing is that of the skipper (RRS4, MSR2). This email is meant as a courtesy only and you should always refer to the Race Documents section of the website for the Notice of Race, Sailing Instructions and Mac Safety Regulations, which govern the race.*