

By D. Scott Croft
BoatUS

One Good “Sniff” May Save a Life

Six Safe Refueling Tips from Boat Owners Association of The United States

It was the end to the Memorial Day weekend when a 32-foot motorboat with four persons aboard pulled up to the fuel dock. Moments later, after filling up, an explosion ripped through the boat - literally separating it into clamshell-like halves. In an instant a 25-year old woman was dead. All of the boat's remaining four occupants as well as a fuel dock attendant were hospitalized.

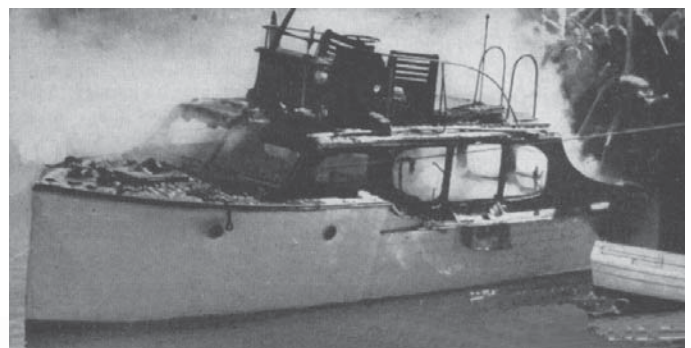
Saddest of all, the accident may have been preventable. A newspaper reported that investigators found that the recently purchased used boat, which was being refueled by its new owner for the first time, may have had a fuel system gasket “give way,” or fail, which allowed gasoline fumes to escape and accumulate below decks. While the owner had properly turned the engine compartment blower on - a required procedure anytime a boat is refueled - not enough of the explosive fumes had been cleared before an engine backfire ignited the blast.

A simple sniff test may have prevented the tragedy, says Boat Owners Associa-

tion of The United States (BoatUS). “While it appears the owner did the right thing by having the blower on to safely remove any fumes from the engine compartment area, he may not have performed the “sniff” test - lifting the engine compartment hatch in an attempt to smell any lingering gasoline fumes,” said Director of Damage Avoidance Bob Adriance. “Unlike a car, boats have fuel tanks and engines located in enclosed spaces which don’t allow gasoline vapors to escape. This accident shows how important it is do a sniff test every time a boat is refueled.”

BoatUS has these six refueling safety tips:

1. Always remove passengers from the boat, and reboard only after refueling is complete and the engine(s) restart-



The sad result of a gas explosion aboard a boat.



ed.

2. Engine should be turned off and do not operate any electrical switches, including the ignition.
3. Keep all doors, ports and hatches closed, and only open them when refueling is complete.
4. To prevent unintentional sparking, hold hose nozzle firmly against fuel fill (and not a rod holder, water tank fill or holding tank, which happens more often than you think). Also don't overfill.
5. After refueling, ensure engine compartment blower runs for at least four minutes. This may delay others waiting to fill up, but it's worth the wait.
6. A quick sniff test takes only a few seconds and is the most effective method for detecting fuel leaks. Always open the engine bay hatch (if boat is equipped) and smell the bilge area as well as any closed compartments or interior spaces.

For more information on safe refueling, check out the BoatUS Foundation for Boating Safety and Clean Water's online boating safety course study guide at www.BoatUS.com/foundation/refuel.

It's "Buyer Beware" When Filling Up the Boat - And a Lot of Other Things - at the Gas Station

Higher Ethanol Gasoline a Problem for Boat Motors, Small Engines

Most recreational boats in the US are "trailer" boats. Stored in the backyard or driveway, they are trailered to the water and enjoyed for the day. They are also refueled at your local gas station or minimart, which may soon offer a fuel, E15 (or 15% ethanol), that is prohibited by the federal government for use in boat motors and violates engine manufacturer warranties. That has the nation's largest recreational boat owners group, BoatUS, concerned over the potential for accidental misfueling.

Last week's EPA's debut of its proposed solution - a small, orange label affixed to the gas pump titled "Attention" - has only heightened the need for boaters to be vigilant, said the Alexandria, Virginia based association.

"As this new fuel starts appearing at the local fuel pump, we see the real likelihood of putting the wrong fuel in your boat," said BoatUS Vice President of Government Affairs Margaret Podlich. "It could lead to costly engine or fuel system damage, and potentially leave you stranded out on the water with a disabled vessel, compromising your family's safety. When a boat's engine stops running, you can't pull over to the side of the road," added Podlich.

Earlier this year, the EPA authorized the use of E15 in 2001 model year and newer motor vehicles. However, the agency did not authorize its use in marine engines or a range of off-road vehicles, tools and equipment. Currently, most boaters in the US have transitioned to E10 (10% ethanol), the maximum percentage of ethanol permitted in gasoline before most engine manufacturer warranties are voided. However, many boaters still go out of their way to find ethanol-free fuel.

BoatUS believes it will be hard for consumers to recognize when or where E-15 is being rolled out to their local gas stations or fuel sellers. "Most likely consumers will encounter E-15 for the first time at their local gas station with little or no fanfare, and may be attracted to its price. This means we have to be alert now - it's really a situation of buyer beware," said Podlich.

The boater's group also said the issue goes far beyond gas-powered boat engines. "I encourage anyone fueling - whether it's for your boat, car, motorcycle, generator or six-gallon portable tank for your lawnmower or leaf-blower, to absolutely know what type of gas is going into that tank," said Podlich. "Unless you have a 2001 or new motor vehicle, the gasoline-powered engines you own were not built for E15. Now is the time to start knowing which gas stations offer you safe fuel.

