

POLICY: RESCUE BOAT OPERATIONS

Hadley Township Fire Department
Policy #121

PURPOSE:

This BPG addresses procedures detailing operation of our rescue boat, as well as other watercraft: qualifications of personnel, care and maintenance of boat, requests for rescue boat support, operating watercraft, use of special equipment.

This policy defines the operational guidelines for use of the department rescue boat when conducting water rescue, fire suppression, training, and standby activities on a pond/lake.

SCOPE:

To ensure safe operation and towing of the Hadley Twp. Fire Department rescue boat to positively assist members in managing a scene or event.

PERSONNEL SAFETY:

Personnel are expected to ensure proper safety equipment is available prior to departure from land. They are also expected to bring with them any equipment necessary to provide the services required for that particular situation.

Personal Flotation Device (PFD) Use: The greatest risk to rescue personnel is that of drowning. The only adequate protection is by wearing a properly fitting, USCG approved type III (or better) PFD.

Fire Department personnel shall wear an approved PFD at all times while:

- Riding in or on any watercraft while moving under power.
- Engaged in any emergency response on or near the water.
- Engaged in any operation in the water.
- In any situation where the member is at risk for falling into the water.

Personnel are expected to know their own swimming ability limitations, and take appropriate measures to ensure their own safety, as well as the safety of any potential victims. Open Water Rescue certification is recommended before getting into the water.

GENERAL WATERCRAFT SAFETY:

Fire personnel may operate from fire department or another agency's watercraft (as available and appropriate). They should avoid operating from civilian watercraft,

if possible, and should never operate from any watercraft in which the operator is impaired or when safety is in question.

Personnel must maintain adequate situational awareness at all times. Wind shifts, wakes and waves, and evasive steering movements may cause the watercraft to shift suddenly throwing riders about (causing injury). Personnel may also be thrown overboard, without warning. Good shoes, sure footing, good balance, and an adequate hand hold should be maintained whenever possible.

All deck areas and surfaces of should be kept clear and clean. Lines not in use should be properly stowed. Excess water should be cleared when possible. Emergency equipment should be properly managed, secured, and stowed when not in use.

Adequate deck lighting should be used at night, when it does not interfere with operations.

When entering the water (either purposefully or accidentally), personnel are in danger of propeller strikes, getting hit by the hull, hypothermia, becoming entangled in lines, and other dangers. If incapacitated in the water (even while wearing an approved PFD), personnel can be in danger of drowning.

It is the responsibility of every member of the crew to manage safety practices for the entire operation.

EMERGENCY OPERATIONS:

At anytime personnel are operating on the water from a watercraft, the operator is ultimately in charge of and responsible for the watercraft. The ranking department officer or senior firefighter is ultimately in charge of the emergency operation.

The operator or fire department member in charge should limit the number of personnel on the craft to the minimum necessary to safely manage the incident (maximum of four (4) people). The operator or fire department member in charge must ensure that all rescue or firefighting operations are conducted in a safe manner. If safety is compromised, the operation must be aborted or modified so that it can be carried out safely.

If it becomes necessary to enter the water to perform a rescue, an operator will remain on-board the watercraft at all times. Watercraft will not be abandoned during emergency operations unless anchor or dock lines properly secure it. The remaining personnel will perform watercraft positioning, scene safety and protection, radio,

and rescue support functions. Radio contact with command and/or land units will be maintained whenever possible.

EMS/RESCUE OPERATIONS:

When responding to EMS or rescue incidents, fire personnel will ensure that appropriate EMS equipment is loaded on to the craft prior to departing the dock. This equipment will ensure that proper treatment can be initiated if indicated on a patient or victim while in the boat prior to transferring the patient to shore units.

Fire department personnel operating from watercraft should enter the water (such as to perform a rescue) only as a last resort. Crews should consider less dangerous intervention methods first, such as reach, throw, and then go. Entry into the water should only be considered if it could be accomplished safely and effectively. The dive team should be requested any time our crew members are entering the water to effect a rescue. Early deployment of the dive team will be critical to the survivability profile of a victim in the event the surface rescue is unsuccessful.

If water entry is deemed the best possible option, personnel are expected to utilize an appropriate level of personal protection that will ensure their safety. If an adequate personal protection level is unavailable, alternative (non-entry) methods should be employed.

Fire department personnel will not enter the water unless trained and equipped to perform the expected tasks. Adequate backup personnel should be readily available whenever possible. Only the minimum number of personnel needed to perform the expected tasks should be used, and exposure time in the water should be minimized as much as possible.

If unable to complete the required tasks, personnel should move to a safe location (out of the water) to regroup. Additional resources should be requested to address the specific type of emergency at hand. Personnel operating in the water should be closely monitored for signs of hypothermia and distress. It may be necessary to rotate personnel to ensure safety.

Water rescue operations may require multiple companies to complete the rescue safely. Boat based operations require personnel on the boat to pick up the victims and personnel on shore, to receive victims and personnel on shore to receive victims. An early request for additional resources (Sheriffs boat, State Police, Ambulance, etc.) will help to ensure that adequate personnel are deployed to safely manage the incident. Operations during cold weather indicate that personnel that enter the water will need

to be evaluated as potential hypothermic patients. This factor will increase the total number of patients rapidly. The incident commander will need to be aware of this fact over and above the initial incident.

Two Pointers (a great distance apart) shall be assigned from the first arriving company on scene whose SOLE RESPONSIBILITY is to watch and monitor status of victim(s) in the water. The Pointers shall maintain constant eye contact with the victim until 1) The victim is rescued, 2) The individual is relieved or 3) The victim goes subsurface. The pointers shall note the victim's last position and relay information concerning the victim.

BOAT FIRE OPERATIONS:

When responding to reported boat fire, crew members will load appropriate extinguishers. Additional shore based resources and command should be requested as needed to assist the extinguishment of any working fires. Personnel responding to on-water fire incidents via water craft are expected to know and work within their limitations.

Firefighters shall wear personal protective equipment, which for on-boat operations will include wildland firefighting jumpsuits and an SCBA (for downwind exposure). SCBAs will be worn OVER an approved floatation device.

Firefighters will not board a burning vessel unless properly trained and equipped to do so. The only time necessary to board a burning vessel is if there is an imminent rescue situation.

The boat operator should make a wide turn toward the burning vessel as they approach it. As this occurs, the crew will be able to survey the water immediately around the burning vessel on all sides for potential victims.

Approach to the burning vessel should ALWAYS be made from UPWIND if possible. This is the only time when a vessel is NOT approached into the wind. Doing so will keep the smoke and heat away from the fire and crew, and provide for better visibility. A rescue situation, obstacles, and onlookers may prevent this from being possible.

If necessary, the boat operator should advise "on-looking" boats to clear the area on all sides of the burning vessel. It is common for boats to crowd the burning vessel, which makes it difficult to maneuver the fire boat for fire and rescue operations. It is also difficult to account for and locate victims in the water.

If a rescue situation is apparent, all actions will be directed toward those efforts until the life safety hazard has been controlled.

Boat fires will be managed in the defensive strategy UNLESS there is an imminent rescue situation, the fire is in the incipient stage, or the fire is already controlled and the structural integrity of the boat is intact.

Once under control, the boat operator will slowly back the fire and begin towing the burning vessel to a location accessible to responding fire apparatus.

When the fire is knocked down, suppression efforts should be suspended so as to keep the vessel afloat. Crews should be ready to reapply suppression agents if the fire begins to burn again. This is common and should be expected.

The burning vessel should be towed to a shore location to meet with land based fire apparatus. The vessel can then be overhauled properly and safely at that location. Arrangement for removal from the lake (environmental control) should be made as soon as the fire is completely extinguished.

TOWING:

1. 7-42 and 7-41 shall be the primary tow vehicles unless otherwise directed by an officer or senior firefighter.
2. Trailer light connection, safety chain connection, and **verifying vehicle is properly secured to the trailer will be preformed prior to towing.**
3. Depolyment must only be performed by department personnel that have shown the ability to properly deploy (back up at boat landing, unhinge/hook, secure to dock, etc.) the rescue boat.
4. There may be circumstances that require the boat to be deployed "off-road" for quicker/strategic access. Extreme caution shall be used when operating all department apparatus and equipment in these incidents. This will prevent damage to the boat that may occur and prevent taking the boat out of service for the incident.

GENERAL:

1. Members involved in an accident or damage incurred to or with the vehicle will report the event to the Incident Commander or highest line officer as soon as possible.
2. Violation of this BPG will result in revocation of operating privileges until reinstated through a review by the department Board of Directors and Chief.