

Fire safety on boats

You can reduce the risk of fire on your boat by following some simple safety steps. Know what to do if there's a fire on onboard, at sea or when you boat's docked at a marina.

Installing a smoke alarm

A smoke alarm can alert you to the risk of fire on your boat, giving you time to escape or alert the emergency services.

- [Smoke alarms and fire emergency equipment](#)

Installing Carbon Monoxide (CO) and gas detectors on your boat

A CO detector will alert you to poisonous carbon monoxide on your boat. Taking the following steps can also protect you from the risk of CO poisoning:

If you have any fuel burning appliances aboard, an engine or generator, fit a suitable audible carbon monoxide alarm for an added re-assurance.

'Black-spot' colour-changing indicator cards are not good enough. You won't have an instant warning of dangerous CO levels and there's no alarm to wake you up.

If there is potential for CO poisoning on your boat, it is better to have an alarm, than not.

If you have a Kite-marked alarm, tested to BS EN 50291, or 50291-1, the advice is to keep it, test it routinely and when it needs replacing, choose a unit tested to BS EN 50291-2 (suitable for boats).

If in doubt about the choice of alarm, call the manufacturer's or supplier's support line for more advice.

Also:

- fit the bubble type leak detector in the gas locker
- push the detector button routinely to check for leaks in the gas system

Find out more:

- [Gas safety and carbon monoxide](#)

Using gas cylinders on boats

If you are using a gas cylinder on a boat:

- install a gas detection system if possible
- when changing cylinders, make sure all cylinder valves are turned off before disconnecting
- regularly hand-pump bilges (the enclosed areas at the inner bottom of the hull) to remove potential low-lying vapours

Cooking safety on boats

You can prevent fire on your boat by following these safety tips when cooking:

- never leave your cooking unattended – turn it off until you come back
- use a ‘proprietary gas lighter’ – a spark device – to light a stove without its own igniter
- keep the cabin well ventilated to avoid build-up of poisonous CO

Electrical safety on boats

Follow these simple steps to protect your boat from the risk of fire:

- always check for the British or European safety mark when buying electrical goods
- use a trained marine electrician to install and service electrical items on your boat
- take care not to overload your adaptors – keep to one plug per socket and use the right fuse or circuit breaker to avoid overheating

Fuel fires – how to avoid them

When using the engine, you should ventilate the engine compartment before starting it up and after any maintenance. You should also check fuel lines and tanks regularly for any cracks or leaks.

Take care with fuel

- if you have to carry spare fuel, always store it on the upper deck
- stop the engine before refuelling and put out all smoking materials and naked flames
- make sure air and gas from tanks is released directly overboard and fuel lines have a direct shut-off valve that works

If a fire starts on board

These are the essential points to remember if a fire starts on board:

- switch off fuel and gas, if possible
- get as far away from the fire as you can get on deck and make sure everybody is wearing a life jacket

If you are inland, get out and call 999 immediately.

If there's a fire at the marina

- if safe to do so, isolate gas and fuel supplies
- get off the boat and make sure all the crew are wearing life jackets
- call the Fire and Rescue Service
- warn neighbouring craft

If there's a fire at sea

- only tackle a fire if it is safe to do so
- contact the Coastguard/ Fire and Rescue Service and identify position or give landmarks
- make sure all crew are wearing life jackets
- prepare emergency grab bag (flares, VHF radio, compass) and life raft
- if safe to do so, isolate gas and fuel supplies
- do not open the engine panel
- only abandon the boat as a last resort

Other important safety advice

For an understanding about lifeguards, safety flags, waves, tides, currents, knowing the dangers and what to do if you get into difficulty, go to:

- [Keeping safe on waterways and at the coast](#)

Make sure furnishings, foam and insulation are fire retardant and:

- make a fire action plan and make sure your crew are aware of what to do if there's a fire
- fit a fire extinguisher in the engine compartment and the cockpit locker
- contain and vent battery boxes