

Summary of the COB Discussion:

Round Table Discussion on Crew Over Board Practice and Procedures Hosted by the Sloop Tavern Yacht Club and the Washington Yacht Club

Date: Thursday Sept 16, 2021

Time: 7:00pm

Format: Online on Zoom

We invited all sailors to join in a discussion of how to prevent and recover crew overboard (COB) on the water, with an emphasis given to raising the awareness of training, devising individual methods and distributing what resources we can provide. The hope was to bring people together for a conversation on the topic, encourage each other to practice COB drills, and gather resources.

This event was co-hosted by the Sloop Tavern Yacht Club and the Washington Yacht Club. It was inspired by the tragic loss of club member Greg Mueller this summer. There was some time to reflect on sailing with Greg and what he contributed to the community. He was remembered as a really kind sailor who liked to share his knowledge with others. Then we broke up into breakout groups on Zoom to address 4 questions. After 20 minutes of group discussion, we gathered together again to share the key insights from each group. Then the discussion turned to questions and comments. Here are some of the key ideas that were mentioned. We conclude with some references that were shared for further reading.

1. How do you practice COB recovery?

- Talk through COB recovery regularly and particularly with new crew.
- Determining who is going to do what thing. Who will watch the CoB? Who will throw a ring or lifesling? Who will drop the buoy? Who will call for help? Who will watch the mainsail in the maneuvers?
- Practice by recovering buoys, life jackets, hats, do figure 8s.
- Keep constant eyes on the object in the water.
- Practice with Lifesling.

2. What is the best tool you have for getting a person back on board?

- Having a Lifesling aboard was highly recommended.
- Wear a life jacket with a crotch strap -- properly attached.
- Ring buoy
- Swim ladder
- Halyard on a winch attached to lifevest or lifesling hooked under the arms of a person.

3. What methods do you use to stay on board and to keep all crew onboard?

- Prevention: one hand to hold onto the boat, one hand to do your work.
- Vigilance and awareness are key.
- If you are holding on to a stanchion/lifeline/active sheet, have a plan in mind if that suddenly breaks.
- Watch out for each other. It is not just the skippers job to watch the crew. If you see someone being lax on safety, say something to them. Help them find a better way. Discuss proper hand and foot placement.
- Use a tether when shorthanded and at night.

4. What have you done differently this summer/year/decade than you did before to keep people onboard?

- Add a crotch strap to my life jacket.
- Cleaning up spinnaker lines around the trimmers feet.
- Every time you get on a boat, consider how you might get back in if you were to fall out. Is there a swim ladder? Is there lifesling onboard? Which halyard could be used? Is there a topping lift?
- Consider wearing a foam life jacket instead of depending on automatic inflation. They don't always work. Be prepared to self inflate your inflatable. Every breath into the tube can help. Check your inflatable will hold air every year by taking it apart and manually inflating it.
- Carry a knife.

Real life challenges come up in real life COB situations. Think through some of the issues by reading about other people's experiences. For example, read ["What Overboard Survivors Want You to Know"](#) by Margaret Pommert in 48 North. Things don't always go as planned, so try to keep breathing and working through the situation. Everyone goes into a bit of shock immediately when it happens, so keep a list of jobs handy. How do you deal with someone who is panicking in the water, or unconscious? How do you keep yourself from panicking? How do you take care of each other after the recovery? How do you care for an unconscious victim? These are some of the tough questions posed during the discussion. We don't have all of the answers, but we are hoping to find and share more resources as time goes on.

We all agreed that the discussion was helpful and should be repeated. We hope to make this an annual event. We need your help to keep that hope alive. Let's encourage each other to plan the next such COB discussion for next fall.

Suggested Resources:

[Cold Water Survival: The first few seconds can be the most dangerous.](#)

By Darrell Nicholson, February 22, 2019 updated: January 25, 2021, Practical Sailor.

["What Overboard Survivors Want You to Know"](#) By Margaret Pommert Nov 1, 2019, 48 North.

["Quick Stop MOB Maneuver under spinnaker?"](#) By TJ SoCal, July 1, 2021 in [Sailing Anarchy](#).

["The Man OverBoard Quick Stop With Spinnaker"](#) By UK Sailmakers.

[Slings, Scoops & Ladders](#) By Darrell Nicholson, December 13, 2005; updated January 2, 2021, Practical Sailor.

["PNW Race Week Accident..."](#) By MPH, June 23, 2021 in Sailing Anarchy.

[Seeking to Understand more about the Crew Overboard Tragedy at Race Week.](#) by Joe Cline August 26, 2021, 48 North.