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First national Boat Fire Safety Week

Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) across the UK are participating in the first ever Boat Fire Safety Week between 26 - 31 March.

The campaign is being promoted to Fire and Rescue Services, as a part of the Fire Kills campaign by the Central government's National Community Fire Safety Centre in association with Warwickshire FRS and the Boat Safety Scheme (BSS).

Boaters interested in receiving free fire safety advice from the Fire and Rescue Service should contact their local fire station to find out if activities are planned for the week in their area.

During the week and depending on the area, participating Fire Services will be offering boat owners free Boat Fire Safety Checks (BFSC) carried out by Service personnel.

These checks identify the risks linked to galley accidents, using candles, smoking aboard, using solid fuel stoves and deactivated alarms, amongst other similar points.

The BFSC's are intended to help boaters to understand the dangers of fire breaking out and the simple preventative actions that can reduce the risk. As such, the BFSC compliments inspections of the fixed fuel, gas and electric installations such as the BSS examination and reviews of safety and emergency equipment like the Royal National Lifeboat Institute (RNLI) Sea Check.

The Fire and Rescue Service's are being briefed to contact their local navigation and harbour authorities to help identify any areas where there are high concentrations of boats whose owners might welcome advice.

Owners wanting to know if the service where their boat is lying is participating can find the contact details of the FRS on <http://www.fire.gov.uk/Find+my+region.htm>; there will be links to some of the participating Fire and Rescue Services on www.boatsafetyscheme.com/boatfiresafetychecks.

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Notes for editors

Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service developed and introduced a Boat Fire Safety Check project in 2006, using operational personnel to deliver key fire safety information to boaters. The inland waterway initiative was produced in consultation with the Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) and has already attracted interest from a number of Fire and Rescue Services.

The partnership is helping the initiative to be adopted nationally, by working with others to make it relevant for boats and their owners wherever the craft are used in the UK.

The BSS is a public safety project owned jointly by British Waterways and the Environment Agency. At least 12 other navigation and harbour authorities have also adopted it. The navigation authorities purposes for the Scheme are to help address the risks of fire, explosion and pollution on small craft. This is done by promoting fire safety and pollution avoidance advice to help boat owners keep themselves and their crews' safe as well as regular examination of fuel systems, gas systems, electrical systems and appliances.



Brief notes on just a few examples of a year of incidents

January 2006

A motor cruiser was connected to the marina shoreline electricity supply and was used to power a dehumidifier. The appliance developed a problem and a fire started. The owner was returning to the boat when there was an explosion. In fighting the fire The FRS filled the marina with foam and other boats had to be moved to safety.

March 2006

A family living aboard a narrowboat in the Midlands removed the LPG system because they wanted a safe boat. They installed a solid fuel stove as a replacement. A few weeks later the stove set fire to the lining of the boat when the teenage daughter was the only person aboard. She escaped after a hard struggle. Although the fire-fighters attended quickly, the spread of fire was rapid and the heat intense. The family's home was a total loss and the fire killed some of their kittens.

April 2006

A retired seafarer was living aboard a boat in the northwest. When LPG vapour escaped from a poor condition hose and its connections, a tremendous gas explosion lifted the cabin superstructure. On falling back, it trapped the skipper. Large items of debris landed on the opposite riverbank. Nearby roads were sealed off and it caused severe disruption for local residents. With more gas cylinders visible, the fire officer in charge allowed two fire-fighters only to be put at risk in the work to free the victim. He was airlifted to a specialist burns unit in the East Midlands, but died the following day.

May 2006

In the home counties, a family due to set off on their first trip aboard on a newly acquired 'entry level' cruiser had its petrol tank filled up at the marina refuelling jetty. Once full, the skipper went to pay for the fuel and spent around 20 minutes in the chandlery. When back aboard, he turned the ignition key, there was an explosion and the boat caught fire. The burning boat drifted close to nearby vessels, but the fire service suppressed the fire with only slight damage to neighbouring jetty. The family escaped without harm and replaced the boat.

November 2006

A cruiser exploded in a large coastal marina. A neighbouring skipper approached the burning craft to rescue the shocked owner. A second blast engulfed the cruiser owner in flames. The fire jumped to an adjacent boat and a third explosion threw the neighbour into the air; he was rescued from the pontoon by a lifeboat. The original cruiser owner was taken to hospital with burns to his face and hands. Many boats were cut free from moorings and were moved away. Eight fire engines, 50 fire-fighters and three lifeboats attended. All boats in the marina, which included some residential craft, and a number holiday homes along the city's seafront were evacuated and the area cordoned off. An emergency pollution control system was put in place.

February 2007

A fire that destroyed a liveaboard boat involved an inexperienced boater who was changing gas cylinders for the first time. Both cylinders, feeding a portable camping gas stove via a flexible hose, were within the cabin. The boater 'finger tightened' the screw thread before turning gas on which leaked immediately. The gas then ignited with most likely source being a lit coal stove. Fire-fighters also found a petrol generator within cabin and further petrol, coal and gas cylinders on the stern deck. The boat had a gas locker, but it was empty. Amazingly, the boater escaped with only slight 'singeing'.