



Flare Training and Hands-on Practice with US Coast Guard

Saturday, June 9th, Members of the NOSPS, Port Angeles and Sequim Yacht Clubs huddled together under the roof of the gazebo at the Ediz Hook Coast Guard Base while receiving instruction on the use of flares. Even though there was a torrential downpour of rain, approximately 20 folks were in attendance. Our Presenter was Chief Petty Officer 2nd Class, Paul Walzinger and his assistant, Seaman St. John. Due to an actual “search and rescue event” in Neah Bay, our scheduled SAR demonstration and tour of the “helo” in the hangar had to be canceled; however, this afforded us the time to receive “excellent” training on the use of flares.

When do you use a flare?

Use a flare when you are in distress and in a location where someone will likely see it, i.e., off land near a city or homes, If you’ve called the Coast Guard for help, they may ask you to fire off a flare so they can pin point your location. If they are in the air, or the sea, they may see it.

The Coast Guard may radio you and request you set off a flare or an orange smoke flare if it is daytime. Flares light up for a relative short time, some 8 to 10 seconds, others 2-3 minutes, this is a relatively short window of time if someone is not looking specifically for the signal.

How to fire a flare:

Shoot two relatively close together, the first one may “catch” someone’s attention, the 2nd one confirms the sighting.

Make sure you fire flares “down-wind” so the burning phosphorous, wax, and other materials fall away from your boat, and your body.

If using a flare pistol, be sure to get yourself in a safe position and ready to fire before you load the flare cartridge in the pistol, immediately point the pistol high over your head with your arm fully extended, then cock. Continue to hold overhead pointing skyward. Fire the pistol – DO NOT LOOK UP AT THE PISTOL, sparks/residual hot material could drop on your face and in your eyes. Lower the pistol, open the barrel (pointing away from you or anyone else) and remove the spent cartridge. Place expended cartridges into a pail/bucket of water to completely extinguish them. Don't drop them overboard; plastics must be brought ashore for disposal.

For cartridges that fail to fire, continue pointing pistol skyward and wait about 30 seconds and pull trigger again – if it still doesn't fire, wait 30 more seconds and carefully eject/remove cartridge and place in container of water.

Different types of flares:

- Pistol with cartridges (small and large pistols)
- Sky blazer – these are launched by holding up over head and pulling a chain that ejects the flares skyward just like a pistol. These are small and can be placed in a shirt or coat pocket, very effective.
- The “clear/white” cartridge that may come with a packet of flare cartridges is a TEST cartridge and can be shot-off anytime to test your gun.
- Hand held flares: Those for Day and/or night use are marked with sun and moon symbols on the end of the flare,
- -Smoke flares are for daytime use only, and continue burning for quite sometime, even in the water. The smell and acrid air from all burning flares is hard on your lungs and causes coughing and eyes to tear, so when possible have them down wind from you.

-Even though flares will often “fire” when they are past the expiration date, The Coast Guard recommends that you get rid of and do not attempt to fire any flares that are 5 years past the expiration date.

Disposing of Old or outdated flares should be done by turning them over at a US Coast Guard Base, or US Coast Guard Auxiliary and US Power Squadrons Vessel Safety Check Stations.

Submitted by: JoAnne Laugallies, NOSPS Safety Committee