

Emergency Action

Emergencies, as we all know, are sudden problems that happen to other people. But just in case you're an exception to this rule, here are some ways to deal with the most embarrassing (and dangerous) ones.

Running Aground

You didn't know about that sandbar or mudflat, or you knew about it but didn't quite clear it. Whatever the case, the problem is how to get your boat floating again. Lift your centerboard clear, heel the boat toward deeper water, and steer it away from the bar. Take care not to damage the rudder during this maneuver.

If this doesn't free the boat, go overboard to free the centerboard if it's stuck on the bottom, and push the boat into deeper water. Replace the rudder and centerboard and get under way again. Remember this place and stay away from it next time.

If nothing works, you can begin to make plans for outside help—and perhaps a tow. A final note: When sailing in unfamiliar water, get a chart, or ask someone who is familiar with the area what to look out for. Know before you go.

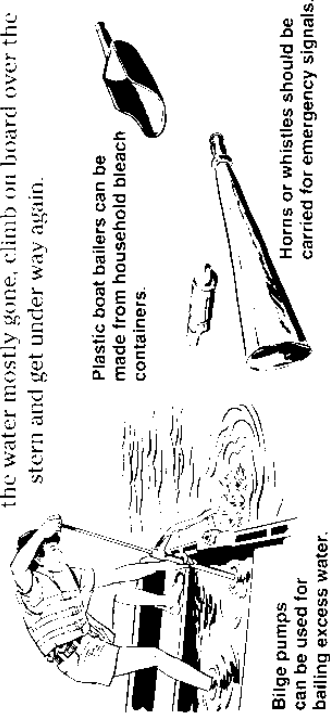


Capsizing

Slowly, almost majestically, the boat heels over and keeps heeling, and suddenly you and your crew are in the water. There are now three things you must **not** do:

- Panic.
- Swim for shore.
- Argue over whose fault it was.
- Stay with the boat, however unattractive it looks at the moment. Most modern sailboats have built-in buoyancy and will not sink. If you hang on, neither will you.
- Slip into a PFD, if you're not already wearing one. (And if you weren't, why weren't you?)
- Now count heads. Is everybody safe, with PFD on, ready for action? Does anybody need help?
- If you swamped close to shore, you might be able to get a line on the boat and work it into shallow water, then right it in relative comfort and safety.
- If a rescue vessel is approaching, stand by to cooperate with the crew when they arrive.

If your boat's in deep water a long way from shore, if there's no help on the way, and if everybody's in good shape, you can have a go at righting the boat yourselves. First, uncleat and free up all sheets. Round up loose equipment floating around (cushions, paddles, etc.) that someone forgot to secure, and secure it. Next, work the boat to head into wind, stand on the centerboard, grip the gunwale, lean back, and pull. The boat might slowly come erect, sails and all. If it does, it's bailing time. Bail vigorously with a bailing scoop, can, bucket, or bilge pump, assuming any of these survived the capsize. If nothing did, bail by hand. Some cockpits are self-bailing. When the boat is stable and the water mostly gone, climb on board over the stern and get under way again.



Plastic boat bailers can be made from household bleach containers.

Bilge pumps can be used for bailing excess water.

Horns or whistles should be carried for emergency signals.