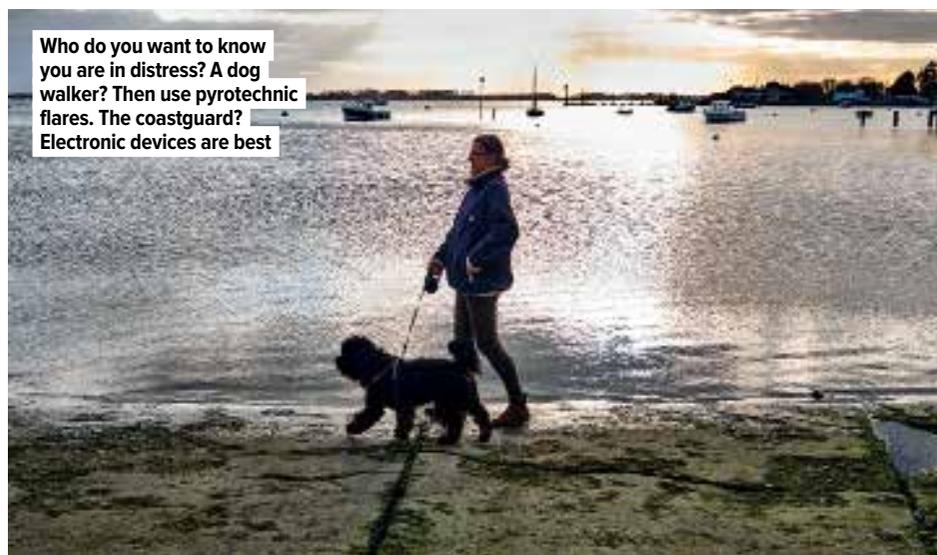


LETTERS

Send us your questions in less than 200 words by email yachtingmonthly@futurenet.com or by post Yachting Monthly, Future PLC, 161 Marsh Wall, London, E14 9AP

WIN

The letter of the month wins a bottle of Pusser's Rum, produced to Admiralty specification and served daily to every sailor in the Royal Navy for more than 300 years (UK residents only) www.pussersrum.com



Who do you want to know you are in distress? A dog walker? Then use pyrotechnic flares. The coastguard? Electronic devices are best

Don't carry flares

I read with interest and apprehension Disposal of Flares (YM, April 2021) and the June issue's Skipper's Tip on firing flares. Based on facts, my tip is don't carry flares:

- Unless your leisure boat is over 13.7m and British registered there is no legal requirement to carry flares. This includes sailing abroad.
- You may however be fined if you are found with out-of-date flares in places like France.
- Pyrotechnic flares (PFs) are commonly not seen or ignored. Since the Titanic we have known that radio communications are better.
- PFs are classed as explosive devices, not permitted on airplanes. Why carry them on a boat containing hundreds of litres of fuel?
- PFs cause injuries. Duncan Wells had a life-changing injury when a flare exploded into his abdomen. The medical publications website PubMed.gov has other examples.
- Protective clothing is required. The Royal Yachting Association (RYA) cannot get insurance to fire PFs and teach the safe use – it's too dangerous. In an emergency, or at night, it could be hard to read the instructions.
- The RYA has stated that PFs are obsolete. The reliability of PFs is susceptible to significant variations in ambient temperature.
- PFs have a short life – three years – and their toxic contents have to be disposed of. They're non-recyclable and usually exploded.
- Familiarity and testing with PFs is not possible. Once they are fired they are gone.
- If you are going to carry them on board they need to be readily available. YM's May edition was all about family sailing. My grandchildren enjoy exploring the boat. Do I really want them finding a PF and setting it off? The consequences would be horrific.

Alternatives? Most of them are found in your June edition: lifejacket flashing strobes, personal locator beacon (PLB), seawater dye, handheld VHF Digital Selective Calling (DSC) radio, satellite messengers and Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons (EPIRBs). You can add to this list AIS MOB lifejacket alarm, torch, CD mirror for signaling, electronic visual signaling device and spare batteries. Plus the humble mobile phone.

Just because the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers (ARC) is behind the times does not mean that YM should use this as an excuse to promulgate the old, dangerous, inefficient and expensive use of PFs. **Dr Gilbert Park The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) responds:** *Flares are one method of attracting attention in a distress situation, but to ensure a distress signal is received by a Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre, it is recommended that a vessel user should also carry a correctly registered EPIRB and have a DSC-equipped radio.*

The RYA responds: *The RYA always recommends that recreational craft carry a means of distress alerting and indicating their location should search and rescue services be required. However, we believe that modern technology provides reliable, accurate and timely distress alerting methods without the need for pyrotechnic signals. Modern electronic distress alerting devices (EPIRB, PLB, VHF DSC, etc.) are readily available at an affordable price and their use avoids the dangers associated with the operation of pyrotechnic flares and difficulties encountered in disposing of time-expired pyrotechnics. Above all, modern methods alert the search and rescue services directly to tell them you need help and where you are without relying on a third party to act on your behalf.*

Wear gloves

Your Skipper's Tip on flares was interesting (YM, June 2021), but omitted a key tip.

You should keep a pair of sturdy riggers' gloves with your flares, something not noted on the instructions.

We attended a flare training session at an army range and the heat and debris that came off the flare was incredible. In an emergency you could set a flare off without gloves, but if you want the maximum burning period with a lower risk of getting burnt yourself, they make a big difference.

Also hold the rocket tube firmly as there's quite a kick when it goes off.

During the inland, summer course we also learnt that parachute flares fired at too shallow an angle set fire to the grass, as do the orange smoke canisters! Fortunately the army was on hand to put the fires out – good training for them too. **Paul Forster**

Autopilot solution

I have a simpler solution for the 'rudder failure on a lee shore' scenario (Question Of Seamanship, YM, June 2021) – switch on the autopilot!

Most wheel steering failures are between the quadrant and the wheel and most autopilots drive the quadrant direct. If the rudder has fallen off then you are stuck with just sails or 'poles, washboards and buckets'. The simplest solutions are often the best.

Ken Burley

James Stevens responds:

Yes you are right, if the yacht had a functional autopilot your simple solution is by far the best. When I faced this problem in the same place on a Sigma 41 we had no autopilot. On reflection I should have mentioned that an autopilot was not an option. Thanks for pointing it out.

Lightning strikes

The lightning strike Skipper's Tip (YM, April 2020) is a little misleading.

In nearly 40 years of flying, I experienced a few lightning strikes, only two of which did



Wear riggers' gloves for heat protection when handling flares

Paul Forster

