

Man Overboard!!!!  
What do you do?

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*Authorities search Lake Houston for missing man*

*By LINDSAY WISE  
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*Rescue personnel searching for a man last seen Thursday evening in a fishing boat on Lake Houston do not expect to find him alive, authorities said.*

*"Four fishermen were out on the lake in a boat," [HFD Assistant Chief Omero] Longoria said. "Apparently, they were cruising along when they noticed one of their buddies was missing and called us at about 6 p.m."*

People fall overboard more than the boating public wishes to think about. Of all the accidents that can happen, this is one of the most publically embarrassing ones. Can you imagine that you just fell off the boat? Weren't you paying attention?

Well, there are lots of reasons people fall off of boats, and many of them not there fault. In fact more often than not, it is the skippers fault for not notifying the crew of dangerous conditions (wakes) that the boat is about to take.

But this isn't a piece about placing blame or begging the reader to boat with due regard to conditions. This is what you do after the unthinkable happens – some goes overboard.

### **First things first**

I know people will read what I'm about to say with an incredous smirk on the face. But think about it, and ask your self do you practice this safe boating technique?

Always keep a constant running head count of crew and guests. The news story clearly showed that the fisherman weren't aware that their buddy fell off the boat. While the story didn't say why they did not know, the reason could run the gamut from an exhausted crew not able to pay attention to too much alcohol or drugs to just plain neglect. What ever the reason, someone fell off, and it took a while for the rest of the people on this boat to notice.

So, again, always keep a running count on who's here and who's not.

## **Sound and the Water**

Many people think if someone falls off a boat, and they are injured by hitting the boat or the props, that the faller will just call out and say “help me, I’ve fallen but can’t get back in the boat!”.

Have you ever tried to hear something while your boat is on plane, the engines are roaring, the wind is blowing, the sea is crashing. All you can hear is the engines roaring, the wind blowing and the sea crashing; you’ll never hear a person’s cry for help!

Second lesson – don’t assume you hear someone, which is why the first lesson is so important.

## **Maintain a DR**

Let’s say you don’t see the person going off the boat (we’ll get to what you should do if you actually see it shortly). How are you going to find the person? Do you maintain a DR course line on your chart?

Don’t know what a DR course line is? It’s a ded reckoning assumed position based on speed and direction from a known or estimate position. Sound confusing? May I suggest a navigation boat course – because most people today don’t keep a DR course and if you just out boating with no real destination then it’s a good chance you have no idea where you just were.

If you know where you’ve been you can turn around and start back along that course line – but not knowing makes it very difficult to figure out where that course line is.

## **PIW**

The Coast Guard nomenclature for a person in the water is PIW. A person in the water is one of the tiniest objects you could search for during a Search and Rescue case. Imagine this very small roundish object bobbing up and down between waves and you trying to pick it out. It is very hard.

It is also very difficult to keep your eye on this object even if you seen it, as you travel through the water on a course to where you believe you saw it.

## **What to do if someone goes over**

So someone goes overboard and you’re lucky enough to have witnessed the event. Here are the procedures to use. Please note these procedures assume that the PIW is not injured and you have at least two crewmen on board. There are also many acceptable variations on these procedures, depending on the

equipment you maintain in your vessel. It also assumes the PIW will be able to get back into the boat. In other words, there are many assumptions included in this procedure.

1. The person who calls Man Overboard has one job and only one job for the entire event – keeping their eyes peeled for the person and always pointing to the direction of the person. Let's call them the Pointer.
2. As the boat and the person moves, because the current and wind will push that person along in the water, our pointer is to be given clear berth to follow the PIW. In other words, stay out of the way of the Pointer. Immediately start throwing floatable objects off the stern. This will give you an idea of which direction the PIW will be pushed and gives you a pointer as to what your direction was prior to attempting to turn the boat around.
3. The person at the helm should push (assuming you have a GPS or Loran and it has this function) the man overboard button. This will place a marker on your screen so you know an approximate position of where you were when the discovery was made.
4. Slowly (and I mean slowly) turn the boat in the direction of the Pointers hand and proceed to the PIW.
5. All other hands should be doing the following (depending on how many others you have): make ready the life preserver or a life jacket with a line attached to throw to the PIW, and assisting the Pointer in keep more sets of eyes on the PIW, because it is very easy to loose site that person.

If you loose site of the person, immediately call a PAN-PAN on VHF CH 16. This will notify all those other boats in the area that there is an emergency as well as the Coast Guard.

6. When you finally and hopefully, approach the PIW, make sure your vessel is downwind to the PIW. In this way the current and wind pushes the PIW into or towards your boat, as opposed to the boat running over the PIW.
7. Kill your engines so the PIW does not get injured by the props.
8. Retrieve your PIW from the lowest point of the vessel (the swim platform or lowest part of the gunwale).

### **Practice and Education**

Man Overboard procedures like everything else involved in boating; docking, navigation, use of fire extinguishers, putting on life jackets; involve practice and learning.

Boating education is just a start. Many of the suggestions on equipment that may be used during a Man Overboard event are not federally mandated equipment.

What equipment you keep and whether or not you practice procedures to mitigate and respond to emergencies is up to every skipper. The United States Coast Guard and Coast Guard Auxiliary is more than happy to provide educational resources to show you the way. It's up to the boating public to take the next step.

For more information about boating safety courses and Vessel Safety Checks, go to <http://www.cgaux.org>