

Personal Safety Knives

Jan 2017

One of the recent changes to the Mac SER (Safety Equipment Requirements) is the requirement for each crew member to carry a personal safety knife at all times.

The SER's require 'a knife, preferable straight blade or, if folding, able to be opened with one hand, to be attached to or carried on each crew member at all times. The Personal Safety Knife must be readily accessible at all times including while wearing foul weather gear and PFD/Harnesses'.

This supplements the long-standing MSR requirement for a cockpit knife, sheathed and securely restrained, readily accessible from the deck or cockpit.

The requirement codifies what has always been considered good seamanship. Having a stout knife readily at hand at all times is a critical safety tool. A check with any chandlery will show that there are three basic types of sailing knives: (a) folding, (b) fixed-blade, or (c) emergency cutter. Any of these will fulfill the requirement as long as it can be demonstrated that it can be opened with a single hand. Please note that many if not most 'multi-tools' such as Leatherman do not meet the MSR requirements as they cannot be opened with a single hand.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |
| <p>Fixed Blade</p> | <p>Folding (One hand)</p> | <p>Emergency Cutter</p> |

Each crew member should think about the appropriate type of knife for that person, given the equipment and clothing worn. For example, the author of this piece has two separate knives; one permanently attached to his PFD, and another worn on the belt when the PFD is not on.

They are different knives that open and are attached differently. Think about where it is attached on your clothing or PFD - can it be grabbed with one hand, even with an inflated PFD or heavy foul weather clothing on? Can you find it by feel, if your sight is blocked by the PFD or you are underwater? Which hand will grab it? Can you get to it with a sailing glove on? Will it fall off our out of its sheath as you go about your business during the race?

Personal Safety Knives

We encourage you to position your knife and then try on your PFD and orally inflate it. Can you actually reach and find the knife with the PFD inflated? If not, reposition it. Consider getting a blunt-tip knife. These are often considered safer for both people and PFDs. Nothing in the MSRs requires that you buy a 'sailing' knife. You can look beyond sailing knives - in particular, divers have similar requirements in a safety knife to sailors.

Check specialty diving stores for options. Knives run from as low as \$29 for a basic diving buoyancy compensator knife to well over \$300.00, with knives at every price point in between.

Specialty sailing 'safety knives' are sold, which may be a good place to start looking. Emergency cutters such as those sold by Gill and Spinlock are a fairly recent development. While small, inexpensive and handy, these knives are quite small, and many experts question how easy it would be to find and employ these devices when in a real emergency. Think hard before relying upon these as your sole safety knife. However, they may prove to be a handy backup.

For some good articles on sailing knives, see these links:

<http://www.sailingworld.com/gear/safety-in-hand>

http://www.practical-sailor.com/issues/34_11/chandlery/Boating-Knives_5695-1.html

(subscription site)

Of course we do not endorse any particular knife or guarantee that any one knife meets the requirements of the SERs.

If you have any questions, please contact us at safety@byc.com, macchair@byc.com, office@byc.com or through the BYC office @ 313-822-1853

Note: The purpose of this article is to highlight concepts for how you and your crew can race as safely as possible. As always, ultimate responsibility for the safety of the crew and the decision whether to race or to stop racing is that of the skipper (RRS4, MSR2). This email is meant as a courtesy only and you should always refer to the Notice of Race, Sailing Instructions and Safety Regulations, which govern the race.

Credits to Matt Gallagher and the Chicago Yacht Club for the original content of this Sailing Safety Series Article