

Smith Point Sea Rescue



“The vessel in distress has sunk . . .”

(see photos above and directly below)

At 1:45 PM the first call came from the Sheriff's Office: “A 50-foot yacht with eight people aboard is taking on water near Buoy 62.” Minutes later, as Rescue I was leaving the dock, the second call arrived: “The vessel in distress has sunk; eight people are in the water!” Rescue I roared down Cockrell Creek and across the Bay—“faster than I had ever seen her move”, said one crew member.

As Rescue I neared the yacht's last known location, it was clear time was precious and finding survivors would be difficult. The early-April water was 49 degrees, and seas were 2-3 feet after a morning of strong winds. With the yacht on the bottom of the Bay, the SPSR crew was searching for the heads of people floating in the frigid, rough waters—heads largely hidden by surrounding waves.



Methodically, Rescue I searched the vicinity of Buoy 62, initially to no avail. Suddenly, a voice crackled over the air, from a hand-held radio grabbed by a passenger as the yacht sank. The man in the water could see a boat—and the captain of Rescue I established that the man was looking at Rescue I, several hundred yards away. The people in the water were still invisible to the rescuers, but the Sea Rescue captain got the radio operator to guide Rescue I to the survivors.

All eight people were alive, but they had been in the brutal water for more than an hour, and several suffered from hypothermia—dangerously low body temperatures. The SPSR crew brought each aboard and administered first aid as Rescue I roared back across the Chesapeake to Ingram Bay Marina. There, crews from three Northumberland County rescue squads successfully treated the passengers. Were it not for Smith Point Sea Rescue, the day might have ended much differently.

Now we need your help!

Once a year, (**and only once a year**), Smith Point Sea Rescue sends this mailing asking friends for a contribution to allow us to continue serving boaters who find themselves in trouble.

Most of your contribution will go to maintaining our current boats and services. But your donation this year will also help us outfit a new all-weather rescue vessel being built for us by Millennium Marine of Canada.



As with Rescue I and Rescue II, this boat will be equipped with a full range of state-of-the-art electronics. This includes the FLIR infrared camera and an Augmented Reality (AR) system that permits long-range identification of navigational aids and other objects. The new vessel will be more capable than any in our history.

In preparation for the new boat, we have retired Rescue III, but we are recycling the name. The all-new Rescue III will be stationed in Reedville for service on the Chesapeake Bay. We will deploy our other boats, a 42' Provincial and a 32' Carman, to upgrade our coverage of the lower Potomac.

Smith Point Sea Rescue . . . There when needed

SPSR is an all-volunteer, 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to serving boaters on the Chesapeake Bay and lower Potomac River. Unlike other First Responders, Sea Rescue receives no regular government funding and is wholly dependent on tax-deductible donations from private citizens, businesses, and foundations. SPSR can be reached 24/7 on VHF Channel 16, or by dialing 911 locally.

Where are you . . . ?

If you are in trouble, help will arrive sooner if you know your location. Boaters often use their chart plotter for this. But your boat may not have one—or it may not be operating due to power loss.

Yet if you have a smart phone and Google Maps or Apple Maps you can easily tell us where you are. Open either app; a blue circle with a white border shows your location. Press and briefly hold the circle. A pair of numbers will appear, like this:

(37.8798819, -76.1837533)

Or this:

37.879880 N, 76.183750 W

Depending on your phone and mapping app, the numbers may be at the top or bottom of your screen. And you may need to scroll up or down to see them—but they are there. (Go ahead, try it out while reading this.) Anywhere in our service area, the first number will start with a “37” or a “38”. The second number will start with a “75” or a “76”.

When you call for help, give the dispatcher or SPSR captain the first five digits of each number. Here, you would say “three-seven dot eight-seven-nine” and “seven-six dot one-eight-three.” We would know you are at the Smith Point Lighthouse, outside the Little Wicomico River. Help is on the way.



Plan for trouble-free boating:

1. Before you leave, check the marine weather (ndbc.noaa.gov or a free app such as Storm Weather: Radar Tracker or Outcast-Marine Weather). *Stay home if small craft warnings or thunderstorms are predicted.*
2. Never leave the dock without a fully charged cell phone, plenty of fresh fuel, and good batteries. *Your life may depend on them.*
3. Tell someone at home where you plan to go and when you expect to return. *If you are incapacitated, they may be your lifeline to help.*
4. Wear your life jacket and have your crew wear them too. *Life jackets save lives.*
5. Return home well before dark and immediately when the weather looks threatening. *Darkness and bad weather make it much more likely you will get in trouble on the water.*

Where can you find us?

Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries

from Point Lookout south to Windmill Point and from the Northern Neck east to Smith and Tangier Islands

Potomac River and its tributaries

from Coles Point to Point Lookout and Smith Point, including both Virginia and Maryland waters

Our rescue boats are deployed to speed response times:

- Cockrell Creek in Reedville
- Smith Point Marina on the Little Wicomico
- Olverson's Marina on the Yeocomico

SPSR: 24/7 hail on VHF Channel 16 or dial 911 locally.

After you call for help:

- Keep VHF radio on Channel 16
- Close phone apps to conserve battery
- Stay off the phone but answer ALL calls—your rescue captain will be calling!

Our 50th Birthday is coming soon!



Smith Point Sea Rescue was founded in 1974, so 2024 will mark our 50 years of serving boaters on the middle Chesapeake Bay and the lower Potomac.

To celebrate, we are planning a birthday party for ourselves. Details are not yet complete, but you can bet there will be food, beverages, and music galore. Our new rescue boat also will be on display for your inspection.

Please keep an eye out for information on our celebration.

Website: (<https://smithpointsearescue.com>)

FB: (<https://www.facebook.com/SmithPointSeaRescue/>)

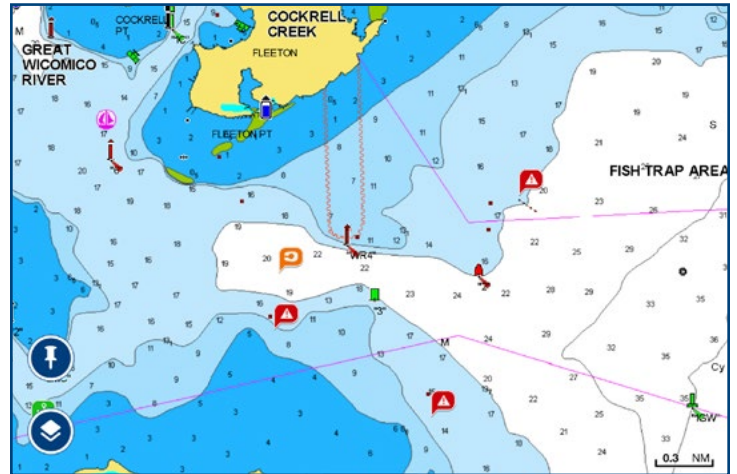
Beware the Fleton Bar

SPSR vessels regularly rescue boats that have run aground in shallow water. The most common location for such groundings is a seemingly innocent stretch of water that (just barely) covers what is locally known as the “Fleton Bar.”

About 5 miles south of the Potomac River, Ingram Bay opens to reveal the entrances to the beautiful Great Wicomico River and to Cockrell Creek, home of Reedville, VA. The northern approach to Ingram Bay is guarded by the Fleton peninsula and by a large expanse of shallow water that hides the Fleton Bar. These shallows are also populated by countless crab pots and by unlighted fish traps that each extend for hundreds of feet. But it is easy to avoid the Fleton Bar—if one honors the navigational aids marking the channel.

The safe channel

As seen in this excerpt from a Navionics® chart, the northern edge of the safe passage is shown by red markers: “2”, a lighted red buoy, and “WR4” and “6”, both lighted red daymarks on pilings. Sea Rescue vessels entering or exiting these waters always identify and pass *south* of these three red markers, leaving them to the right on entering and to the left on exiting. (We also pass *north* of the green buoy “3”.)



The consequences of straying

What happens if a boat doesn't follow this suggested course? There are three common outcomes: (i) the vessel becomes ensnared in one of many uncharted fish traps in the area; (ii) the boat collides with the concrete foundation and stone rip rap left behind (near “WR4”) when the Great Wicomico Lighthouse was removed; or (iii) the craft runs firmly aground in the shallows of the Fleton Bar, leaving it high and (almost) dry.

If the worst happens and your boat is damaged or stranded, **Sea Rescue can be reached 24/7 on VHF 16 or by dialing 911—and there is never a charge for our services.** But as much as we are happy to be of service, we think you will be even happier if you simply beware the Fleton Bar.

The Oyster Roast has returned, and better than ever!

After an unwelcome pause for Covid, our popular, long-running Oyster Roast is back. Some 300 people said farewell to winter at Smith Point Sea Rescue's 2023 Oyster Roast—the 27th holding of this Northern Neck Tradition. Guests enjoyed delicious steamed oysters, kegs of beer, hot dogs, and Smith Point Sea Rescue Clam Chowder.

This was our first year holding the Roast at Cowart Seafood, in Lottsburg, and we hope we'll be back for many more. The facility and the Cowart employees (plus Lake Cowart himself) were fantastic. The result: we served more oysters, clam chowder, hot dogs, and beverages than ever before. Everybody left with smiles on their faces.

Naturally, we are already planning for the 2024 Oyster Roast. Please plan to join us and bring your friends for a true Northern Neck experience, eating fresh oysters in a waterfront oyster house. Put the date (tentatively the first Saturday in March), in your calendar now for an afternoon of good food, good fun, and good friends.



Dockside Rescues

Most of our rescues are well away from docks. But we do get calls for dockside rescues, and sometimes it is because a boat has sunk at its dock. Even when Sea Rescue quickly dewateres and refloats the vessel, just a short stay in the water can cause thousands of dollars of damage to the engine, electronics, upholstery, and cabinetwork.

The perils of thru-hull fittings

For boats kept in the water, the cause of dockside sinking is usually a thru-hull fitting—literally a hole in the boat put there by the manufacturer. Some of these fittings are underwater, as with intakes for marine toilets and cooling water for inboard engines. Others are above the waterline, as for bilge pumps or galley water outlets and cockpit drains. If a thru-hull fitting fails, especially if it is underwater, the boat may sink—sometimes in a matter of minutes.



The many ways boat lifts can fail

When vessels are kept on boat lifts, there is another hazard: the failure of some part of the boat lift, causing the vessel to be dumped into the water. The most common culprits are the cables that do the lifting and the wooden bunks on which the boat rests. Cables fail most often due to corrosion or damage caused by kinking or off-kilter cable guides. Bunks usually fail due to rot, though they and other lift components can fail simply because the loaded weight of the boat exceeds the design capacity of the lift.

“Smith Point Sea Rescue . . . There when needed”

What Can You Do?

1. *Know*—identify the location of all your thru-hull fittings and whether they are plastic, Marelon, or bronze. Not sure? Ask your boat mechanic. Are your lift bunks wood that rots or vinyl that doesn't? When was your lift last serviced by a professional? Does the capacity of your lift exceed the loaded weight of your boat?
2. *Inspect*—at least once a season, inspect your thru-hulls, looking for cracks, corrosion, and ultraviolet fading or discoloration. Every time you use your lift, look at your cables for rust, broken strands, and kinks and watch for instability or signs of rot in the bunks.
3. *Maintain*—rinse the boat lift, including cables, with fresh water every time you use it. Grease the motors once or twice a year.
4. *Replace*—as soon as practical, replace plastic thru-hulls with Marelon or bronze. Depending on usage and water salinity, experts recommend new cables at least every five years, and consider replacing your wooden bunks with vinyl.

Smith Point Sea Rescue

MONITORING VHF CHANNEL 16

On-call 24 hours a day, 365 days in the year.

Mid-Chesapeake Bay Area

CALL 911 or
Hail VHF 16

DONATIONS

“Like” us on Facebook and see updates. Visit smithpointsearescue.com to see our history and news!

Please send tax deductible donations to: Smith Point Sea Rescue, P.O. Box 662, Burgess, VA 22432

Prefer to donate online? Go to our website <http://smithpointsearescue.com> and click on ‘Donate’ link

<https://www.paypal.com/fundraiser/charity/152821>