

Smith Point Sea Rescue

“Quick, jump in the canoe...”

...we'll go get your ball!” Those were likely the words that led to tragedy as a mother and her 8-year-old son watched his ball being blown offshore from the lawn where they had been playing on a sunny spring afternoon. A neighbor watched in horror as the mother and son paddled frantically as they tried to turn the canoe back to shore as it, like the soccer ball, was swept out of a creek near Annapolis and into the Bay. Sadly, mother and son both drowned.



Small boats, big winds, a deadly combination.

Every year Smith Point Sea Rescue is called to assist boaters who are simply overwhelmed by the wind. If you own a small boat; a canoe, sailboat, kayak, dinghy or paddleboard...it is essential that you use these vessels (or allow visitors to use these) only in sheltered, calm waters when there is little wind. Boaters should always wear a life jacket and carry a cell phone in a waterproof bag.

Even larger boats with small engines can be overwhelmed by the wind. Recently an experienced sailor was out enjoying his 24' sailboat in the Potomac River when a sudden thunderstorm overtook him before he could reach shelter. He lowered his sails and started his kicker outboard motor, but the motor was not powerful enough to turn his sailboat as the wind swept his boat into a mass of fishnets. Night fell and the storm raged on. Sea Rescue could not reach the boat now deeply tangled in the nets in huge seas. The Coast Guard eventually pulled the man to safety but his sailboat was lost.

Now we need your help!

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

This year we ask you to consider a larger donation to help pay for the installation of a \$29,000 FLIR camera and monitor on Rescue 1, our most seaworthy vessel. After miraculously saving a man who spent four hours overboard in rough seas at night, Smith Point Sea Rescue decided it needed to invest in a see-in-the-dark system that would help find a person (or boat) in total darkness. Your donation will help pay for this new capability.



Please page through this newsletter, look at the photos and read about our rescues. None of this would be possible without the financial help from people like you who love the Chesapeake Bay and our way of life on the water.

As a boater we recently rescued wrote to us:

“Thank you so much gentlemen of Sea Rescue... you turned a potential disaster into a good afternoon.”

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



Helping you at night can be challenging. Crab pots and pound nets are unlit and can entangle your boat or ours. Finding you by differentiating your boat light from all the house lights along the coast is often difficult. Those who cruise the Bay in big, high-tech sailboats and trawlers make a habit of finding a marina or a safe anchorage well before sunset to avoid the pitfalls of navigating at night. We suggest you do the same. Nighttime joyrides often end poorly!



Thanks to your generosity over the years, in 2019 Sea Rescue was able to add a rescue boat to its fleet. The “new” (used but more seaworthy) boat we bought and retrofitted is now in service helping boaters on the Potomac River. The boat it replaced, Rescue 3 (above), is now happily plying the calm waters of the Little Wicomico bringing quick help to those who run into trouble on those protected waters.



They say there are two good days in every boat owner's life...the day one buys the boat and the day one sells the boat. For local boaters, there may well be a third good day...the day Smith Point Sea Rescue throws you a line and tows you home.

Our Best Advice for trouble-free boating:

1. Check the marine weather (ndbc.noaa.gov or the app SailFlow). 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.
3. Return home well before dark and immediately when the weather looks threatening.



What to do if you Need a Rescue:

1. Remain calm and check status of all passengers. If not already wearing, hand out lifejackets.
2. Check engine for fire and boat for any water intrusion.
3. Deploy your anchor to prevent boat from drifting into shallows or sea lanes.
4. Check your location on your GPS, cell phone, or chart. Write down your latitude and longitude.
5. Call for help by dialing 911, or by accessing Marine Channel 16 on your VHS radio. Calmly explain your situation, describe your boat, and provide your location (ideally your latitude/longitude). Leave your cell phone number so rescuers can keep you informed of their progress finding you.
6. Stay off your cell phone while waiting, to save the battery and to allow rescuers to reach you quickly.
7. When you see the rescue boat (flashing red lights) start waving (at night flashing a flash light) so the crew knows which boat to help.
8. When the rescue boat arrives, follow the crew's directions. You will stay in your boat which will be towed to a nearby marina or to your home.
9. There is no charge for assistance provided by Smith Point Sea Rescue, so do thank these trained volunteers for bringing you home safely...and do donate annually to keep this service operating.



Some of the 40 members of Smith Point Sea Rescue in 2020

The only all-volunteer, no-charge marine rescue service on the Bay.

Each member of Sea Rescue agrees to serve “on duty” for approximately one week each month. During one’s duty week, a member stands ready to board a rescue boat in any weather and at any hour. On-duty members agree to stay within a 30-minute drive of their rescue boat, and to keep their vhs radio and cell phone with them 24/7.

To expedite rescue response time, there are two rescue teams. One team is based in Callao with two rescue boats at Olverson’s Marina on Lodge Creek. They respond to emergencies on the Potomac River, from Coles Point to the Bay. The second team is based in Reedville, with two rescue boats in the Sea Rescue boathouse on Cockrell Creek and one vessel at Smith Point Marina for service in the Little Wicomico. The Reedville team responds to calls for help on the Bay and its tributaries from Point Lookout to the Rappahannock River.

Every month, members meet to review all missions completed that month. Each rescue is described and discussed, evaluating how effective the response was, and how future service could be improved. This allows all members to learn and gain experience from every mission, not just those one happens to attend. Members are also required to repeat a prescribed regimen of at-sea training every six months, and to be trained in CPR and basic First Aid.

So why do members serve? Most will tell you for the satisfaction of helping fellow boaters when they are in trouble. “It’s a terrible feeling to break down out on the water. You feel so helpless and alone. The relief on people’s faces when we pull up and know just what to do to get them home safely is worth the inconveniences of being on duty.”

26th Annual Oyster Roast enjoyed by all!

More than 300 people bid farewell to winter at Smith Point Sea Rescue’s 2020 Oyster Roast. Guests enjoyed 60 bushels of delicious steamed oysters, 5 kegs of beer, 52 pounds of hot dogs, and 10 gallons of Smith Point Sea Rescue Clam Chowder. Please plan to join us in 2021 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. Many thanks for the generous donations from Little River Seafood and Cowart Seafood.



FOUR MEMORABLE MISSIONS

Double Trouble: On a cold fall day a young man called to report he was on the Jetties beach where his sailboat had been driven by high winds (see photo at left below). Rescue 1 traveled from Reedville in rough seas and was able to tow the sailboat off the beach and in to Smith Point Marina. The crew advised the sailor that the weather was worsening and that his small outboard motor was no match for the wind that day. As Rescue 1 returned to Reedville a waterfront resident called to report a sailboat had just crashed onto his beach. The crew returned to find the same young man, again beached. The crew again towed him to the marina but noted that his rudder was now broken preventing him from making a third attempt!



Fired up: A member of Sea Rescue was fishing alone in his personal boat in the Potomac River near Smith Point when he heard a loud explosion and saw heavy black smoke rising from the Little Wicomico River. He quickly raced to the scene where he found a boat fully engulfed in flames (see photo at right below). He was relieved to see that another boat had picked up the burning boat's passengers who had jumped into the water. He called Sea Rescue for assistance and Rescue 1 arrived shortly. The heat was so intense there was little the crew could do other than keep other boats away as the boat burned and sank. The crew returned the next day when the remains of the boat were dragged ashore and removed by truck.



Needle in a Haystack: A frantic man called 911 and reported that the owner of the boat he was on had disappeared overboard and that he did not know where he was or how to operate the boat. Sea Rescue headed out in heavy seas and total darkness and began looking for the boat. Incredibly the crew found the owner of the boat who had been floating in the water for four hours (thanks to his life jacket). After pulling him from the water the crew resumed their search for the boat. An hour later the crew spotted the boat with its lone passenger, pulled him into the rescue boat and towed the empty boat back to the Sea Rescue boathouse in Reedville. The chances of finding the man in five foot seas in the dark inspired the crew to refer to this rescue as "divine intervention."

Minutes from Tragedy: On a cold November evening a waterfront resident called 911 when he saw a small skiff capsize in high winds and a man and his dog struggling in the water. When called, the Sea Rescue captain realized that the man would not survive for long in 47 degree water, so he called a Sea Rescue member who lives nearby to ask him to immediately launch his private boat and try to reach the victim. Luckily, the member's college-age son was home and the two men raced to the scene where they first saved the panicked dog, then saw the man who was unresponsive and hugging a piling in deep water. They were able to pull the man aboard and rush him to an ambulance that was waiting ashore. Man and dog survived thanks to quick thinking by all involved.

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
804-580-5221

DONATIONS

"Like" us on Facebook and see updates (videos, photos, descriptions) of our missions and events. Visit our webpage at smithpointsearescue.com to learn more about our history and news!

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