

# PE Best Practices

*Field-Proven Techniques For Better Boater Education*

Education Department

July 2004

## Hands-On Highway Signs

*By Chris Thomsen  
IT, Flotilla 09C16-06*

Teaching the BS&S chapter on Highway Signs has always been problematic, because there is so much material and it is often confusing. Our flotilla decided to try visual aids in hopes of improving the learning process. We made all kinds of small ATONs out of wood, then painted, numbered, and lettered these replicas. We have nun and can buoys, day marks, safe water buoys, range lights, preferred channel markers, and danger signs. The possibilities are almost limitless.

In the classroom, we create different kinds of boating scenarios using the model ATONs. This gives students an opportunity to see if they can navigate safely along the route that the buoys indicate. It has proven to be a great way for them to put their new learning to practical use. Our instructors have been happy with both the class response and the test results for that chapter, which indicate much improved learning among our students.

*Hands-on exercises are a great way to bring learning to life, especially when teaching more complex or abstract topics. Let's hear from the rest of you. How are you integrating hands-on practice into your PE programs? –Ed.*

## To Reach More Boaters, Offer More Choices

*By Robin Freeman  
Deputy Department Chief - Education*

How many of you like ice cream? No one is looking, so quit grinning and admit it!

Now imagine, if you will, a company that makes the BEST ice cream in the world...*so* creamy, rich, and wonderful...and *good* for you, too. Why, a single serving is said to be a veritable vitamin capsule on a cone. This product is simply the best of the best.

But the company *only* makes vanilla ice cream. And good as it is, vanilla just isn't for everybody. To further complicate matters, the company only dishes up huge servings of this wonderful product. No such thing as a child's size here. No such thing as consumer choice here either. Perhaps not surprisingly, the company is finding that interest in its franchises is waning.

My point? Too often, flotilla public education programs offer but "one flavor" – I'm talking about BS&S of course. Like our hypothetical premium ice cream, BS&S is a great product. But what about the millions of people who seek more variety, or who don't want such a big portion, or who have special needs?

To reach these people, we need to adopt more of a "31 flavors" approach. That's why we have  
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## To Reach More Boaters (Continued)

developed alternatives like Boating Safely and America's Boating Course (which can be taken as either a home study or classroom course). We also offer modular BS&S lessons 7-12 as stand alone, teaser courses. We promote GPS. We have many "flavors" with which to tempt the buyer. And you can count on your Education department to keep adding to the menu.

Flotillas (our auxiliary "franchises") that promote only BS&S will be out of customers fast. There are markets for all flavors. Flotillas that act to serve these diverse markets will reach many, many more people with our life saving messages.

As an organization, we simply must grasp this reality. We have to fight the notion that the 13 week, 26 hour BS&S is for everyone. Again, it's a great course...it's right for some, and always will be. Some 30,000 people took BS&S last year. But compare that to the **70 million people** who engage in recreational boating. We need to figure out how to reach the more than 60 million other people who did not take a boating safety course.

My answer? More flavors. To reach more boaters, we must offer more course options. And we need as many of our flotillas as possible to accept the challenge, and to offer as many choices as possible. Can we count on you?

*In the early days of the automobile, Model Ts were available "in any color you want as long as it's black." But we no longer live in a one-color- (or size, or flavor) fits-all world. To reach more boaters, offer more choices. Make it easy for your customers to do business with you – Ed.*

## Contribute to PE Best Practices

Do you have a Best Practice to share with your teammates in the public education arena? If so, please email Tom Angott at [tangott@comcast.net](mailto:tangott@comcast.net).

## Cheap is Good, Free is Better By Vincent Pica II, FSO-PE 18-06

To enhance knowledge and add to the fun, we hand out a one-page flyer on a seamanship topic at the end of every class. Topics include "How to Use Your Wristwatch as a Compass," the Eldridge Poem of the Rules of Navigation, and more. We find that our students really look forward to receiving this document, as it has the educational value of a war story but takes a fraction of the time to convey the message. Since it is a separate handout, they also view it as something extra...and free!

*This is a great way to reinforce the key messages for each session – Ed.*

## PE More Than Just Safe Boating By Fran Fisher, 11NR

In our Public Education mission, we rightfully focus on safe boating practices. But it's also important to take advantage of opportunities for educating people about marine safety and good citizenship. For example, a second grade class at a local elementary school recently undertook a project on marine life. They even converted their classroom into an aquarium, complete with a kelp forest.

We spoke to these students about marine debris and the effects of litter on marine life. To reinforce the message, we showed the class a movie called "Inky the Whale" (which we got from the MSO). "Inky" is the true story of a female pygmy sperm whale stranded on the New Jersey coast on Thanksgiving Day in 1993. She was rescued with the help of volunteers and a U.S. Coast Guard helicopter. Scientists at the National Aquarium in Baltimore discovered her stomach was full of plastic debris, which prevented her from getting proper nutrition. The movie ends happily, yet reminds us of how many mammals, sea turtles, and fish die each year because of marine debris. What a great way to show kids how trash impacts our environment!

*Fran adds that she showed the movie to her flotilla the next week, and members were equally enthusiastic. "Inky the Whale" sounds like a great resource! Ed.*

## Public Education is Preventive Search & Rescue

**By Tom Angott,  
DVC-EF, Education**

The mission of the Education Department of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary is to provide exceptional boating safety education to the American public. To that end the department will:

- Develop and distribute effective educational materials
- Adapt, adopt, and promote appropriate resources from third parties
- Promote appropriate technological resources
- Explore new ventures in boating education
- Enhance the educational effectiveness of all Auxiliary Public Education Instructors
- Pursue and encourage collateral educational opportunities that extend beyond the classroom
- Foster synergistic relationships with other boating organizations and agencies
- Utilize Public Education to enhance recruiting and retention

Recognizing that an informed boating public is a safer boating public and that boating injuries and fatalities can be reduced through effective public education, the Department’s ultimate effectiveness will be measured by the extent to which we see fewer injuries and fatalities in recreational boating.

The primary purpose of the Auxiliary is to support the Coast Guard in its mission to make the waterways safer for the recreational boater. On the principle that “an informed boater is a safe boater,” the Auxiliary constantly strives to educate the boating public.

Some of this education takes place when we assist disabled vessels or rescue boaters in distress, or when vessel examiners perform courtesy vessel safety checks. But the primary mechanism for informing the boating public is through *Public*

*Education* (PE) courses offered by Flotillas throughout the country.

Some years ago a Coast Guard officer was addressing a group of Auxiliary instructors and asked for a show of hands in response to this question, “How many of you have actually saved lives in your years of service to the Auxiliary?” A few hands went up, chiefly among those operational Auxiliarists who handled SAR cases.

The Coast Guard officer went on to explain that public education was really “preventive SAR,” a cost effective way to lower the likelihood that boaters would call upon Coast Guard or CGAUX SAR resources. Well-found boats with proper safety equipment and skippered by knowledgeable mariners are simply not as likely to get in trouble and are more likely to survive trouble if it occurs.

As the discussion continued, many Auxiliarists in the audience recounted some of their personal experiences in the classroom...teaching students to have the proper types of Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) on board and readily accessible... to plan their vessel’s fuel consumption...to post lookouts to warn of converging traffic or other hazards to navigation... and literally hundreds of other examples of preventive SAR. At the end of the talk, the question was asked again, “ Who here has saved lives?” This time almost everybody raised their hands in response.

*Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that PE really is about saving lives and reducing injuries. We’re trying to give boaters the knowledge they need to avoid trouble in the first place. Preventive SAR is a great concept. – Ed.*

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## Question of the Month

**Question:** Why should I order PE materials through my DSO-MA and the Auxiliary Center when I can get some of the same materials from Amazon for less money?

**Answer:** *It is important to understand that the Auxiliary Association gets no funds from the U.S. Coast Guard. What difference does this make insofar as your ability to run public education at the Flotilla level? A great deal! Let's tick off just a few of the PE-related items that are funded by your Coast Guard Auxiliary Association:*

- *The Education Department's web site that serves as a source for you to download a wide variety of education resources*
- *Those public education CDs that AUXCEN will mail you at no charge*
- *The printing, packaging and shipping of all your public education materials*
- *Funding of your members to attend conferences where we can learn best practices that are passed along to you...most recently, the PE Speedgrams on carbon monoxide and cold water immersion*
- *The capability to pursue larger revenue sources enabling us to do even more...the recent rollout of Waterway Watch, for example*
- *Having sufficient funds in the Auxiliary Association treasury to negotiate favorable pricing on products purchased...with more dollars we can buy more and buy cheaper*

*So if you save a few dollars on your Flotilla's purchase by going outside normal channels who gets hurt? The Auxiliary, your District, you, and the very public we serve!*

*The Association is hurt for obvious reasons - the loss of the surplus on sales of education products to your District. Your District is hurt and their capabilities to support your activities impaired by the loss of the small mark-up taken there. You are hurt because over time the E department will be less*

*able to support the exemplary job you're now doing in public education.*

*Is the public hurt by having gotten a "better price" so your Flotilla could charge less? Absolutely! Lost revenue means fewer resources for supporting recreational boating safety education, which ultimately deprives the boating public of the services that we all perform so admirably. It's easy to see that the negative effects cascade directly to those we want most to serve.*

*So, let's not make Amazon.com any wealthier at the public's (and our) expense. Try to remember that while it may cost a buck or two more to buy some published books through the Auxiliary versus an online store, in the long run you're doing a better job of public service by securing your materials exclusively through the Auxiliary.*

