

Inland Waterways News

Safety

Fire

John Thompson

[In early September] in Hazelhatch a 36ft narrow boat caught fire in the galley area. One occupant could not get out because forward hatch was locked from inside and outside. A passerby noticed the fire and helped the occupant out and put out the fire. The fire was so hot that it popped one window. **Make sure all safety hatches and doors are easily opened.**

Water

Kieran Walsh

Following the fishing boat tragedy off the south-east coast, I installed a float switch in the bilge of **Setanta** connected to a 12-volt alarm that will kick in if the water level in the bilge ever got the better of my auto bilge pumps or even if the domestic batteries ever went low from pumping water continuously. This new flood alarm is running off the engine battery and is fused of course. Float switch €20, 12-volt sound bomb from an alarm system €11 euro. Good night's sleep, priceless. Nobody ever knows when the gremlins will strike at an engine cooling hose or shaft seal.

Lifejackets

Paul Garland

My grandchildren recently aquired automatic lifejackets and, in the way children do, it did not take long to put them to the test. They worked perfectly, the hair not even getting wet. Back to the supplier for new cylinder and re-arming kits. Luckily my son noticed that the cylinder was a full size and not the 18g (half size) originally fitted. He questioned this and was told by the supplier that this cylinder was suitable. Still unhappy, he phoned the agents who were aghast and told him, as he had suspected, that a full adult cylinder would burst a child's jacket. He had difficulty in obtaining the correct cylinders; several weeks passed before stock arrived and even then the jacket had to be swapped as the makers went out of business. All is now well and a stock of cylinders is aboard. I would urge everyone who uses automatic jackets to carry spare cylinders — and please check they are suitable replacements.

Carbon monoxide

Kealan Reynolds pointed to a report saying that, in the US, carbon monoxide (CO) causes about 500 unintentional deaths a year. Two children suffered CO poisoning (but, happily, recovered in hospital) from exhaust fumes on the bathing platform of a water-skiing boat. The report said that "Recreational boaters should be aware that boat exhaust fumes can flow back into the rear of the boat and that CO in the exhaust is undetectable, as it is odourless and colourless. They should also avoid swimming or body surfing near the exhaust system while the boat or generator is running."



Then, in January, two English boaters died of CO poisoning on their narrowboat on the Grand Union Canal. It is thought that the source was a solid fuel stove. Now read on

The hidden killer

John Thompson & Siobhan Hynes

Many people are spending more time on their boats in summer and winter, and there are many residential boaters. Boat heating is becoming a necessity, and with these heating systems comes a danger that many of us do not know about or have any warning about.

Our experience of this hidden danger happened on Thursday night 6 February 2003. We live on board year round; we have a kerosene stove that heats the whole barge and smoke alarms galore. We did purchase a carbon monoxide alarm in a local hardware shop, which we fitted in the main saloon area. We also had four canaries as pets.

We awoke Friday morning, uncovered the bird cage and found four dead canaries lying on their backs in the cage. Canaries will only die from three things: fright, cold and fumes/gases. After ruling out the first two, we were left with gases and fumes. There was no obvious smell of gas on board, but we called in a specialist who checked the whole system, including emissions from the water heater and cooker. He found everything to be in line with installation guidelines and no problems were found with the gas system.

We moved to the stove and he noted that there was not adequate ventilation, which he pointed out would create a carbon monoxide hazard. We took a reading at the time but no signs of CO were found. Over the next two days the interior was monitored by a CO, O₂ and hazardous gases sensor, which was lent to us. During that time the CO level was between 0 and 21ppm. A level of 50ppm is tolerable for about 8 hours. As this level of 21ppm was measured with windows open, what would the level have been when the windows were closed and the birds died?

Only for the canaries, who knows what could have happened.

Flares

Paul Garland

On the Shannon Rally last year many boats were found to have time-expired flares on board. I contacted the Army Barracks in Athlone, opposite which we were moored. They were of no assistance and had no idea how we might dispose of the flares. I have since located Marine Notice No13 of 2000 which lists Derg Marine, Killaloe and O'Sullivan's Marine, Naas Rd, Rathcoole. I would urge anyone with out-of-date flares to dispose of them properly.

*Michael Clinton at O'Sullivan's (see ad on back cover for contact info) will take your old flares and dispose of them safely for you. The service is free and you are under no compulsion to buy new flares from them in return. However, you **must** ring in advance to make an appointment and you **must** get and follow their advice on packing and marking the old flares. Ed.*

