

FYI

The Go/No Go Decision

By Chris Couch

As the captain of your vessel, you are directly responsible for the safe navigation of your vessel and the safety of every person onboard. How many boating horror stories have you heard? How many of those stories were weather related? Now, how many stories like that do you personally have?

- Do you check the weather forecast in advance of your intended departure?
- Do you check the current weather at the time of your departure?
- Do you have a set of weather limits that you have defined for yourself?
- Do you make the decision to go or not to go depending on the weather?

Just in the past year off the waters of Florida, there have been several high-profile incidents of people lost at sea that include two boys, four adult males, a father and his three kids, and a large commercial vessel with all hands lost. In each of these cases, weather was a major factor. In each of these cases, supposedly, these people were experienced boaters. And yet, in each of these cases, they all lost their lives.

The official cause of these accidents has yet to be determined. But, it is my theory that had safe and prudent decisions been made with regards to the forecasted weather, all of these people would still be with us today.

This of course is the worst-case scenario of what can happen when bad decisions are made with regards to the weather, but it illustrates the point. There is no substitute for watching the weather and making safe prudent decisions.

In my work as a long-range delivery captain and my previous work as a corporate pilot, I utilize the Go vs. No Go decision. I will routinely change my trip plans based on the forecast and current weather conditions. My trip plans revolve solely around the weather and not around schedule.

By consistently watching the forecast weather and making the safest and most prudent decisions that I can with regards to that weather forecast, I give myself the best chance possible of having a smooth and safe voyage. Whether your trip is thirty minutes or three hundred miles, Puget

Sound or Prince William Sound, a careful watch of the forecast weather should be a major part of your trip planning and decision making.

For all inside Northwest waters, these weather tools are available to us:

- National Weather Service Seattle: wrh.noaa.gov/sew (Marine forecasts and national data)
- Buoy Center: ndbc.noaa.gov (Real time weather observations)
- Environment Canada: weatheroffice.ec.gc.ca (Marine Forecasts)

For those of us who venture offshore, there are numerous websites that give us the computer-generated forecast models. One of those is buoyweather.com.

All of these sites are easily accessible on your smartphone so there is no excuse not to be able to access forecast and real time weather at any time. Do not be one of those captains with a weather-related horror story. The safety of your vessel and all who are onboard her is directly related to the decisions that you make. The quality of your decisions will directly affect the quality of your boating experience.

So before you go, please take a good look at the weather. Make safe and prudent decisions, and remember, it's ok to say no.

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