
Talking Points

Boat and Dock Safety

- Water is a powerful conductor of electricity. It is especially important to be aware of electrical hazards around water.
- Watch the forecast and make sure you are inside when a thunderstorm approaches. Lightning can strike up to 10 miles from the area in which it is raining. Wait at least 30 minutes after the last thunder or lightning before returning outdoors.
- When boating or fishing, be aware of your surroundings and potential electrical hazards. Always check the location of nearby power lines before boating or fishing.
- Maintain a distance of at least 10 feet between your boat and nearby power lines.
- If fishing, make sure you are casting the line away from power lines to avoid potential contact.
- Always lower masts of sail boats before using boat ramps to exit the water.
- If your boat does come in contact with a power line, never jump out of the boat into the water — the water could be energized. Instead, stay in the boat until help arrives and warn others to stay away.
- Ensure proper installation and maintenance of electrical equipment on docks and boats. All electrical installations should be done by a professional electrical contractor familiar with marine codes and standards and should be inspected at least once a year.
- Have a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) breaker installed on the circuit(s) feeding electricity to the dock. A GFCI will trip the circuit and cut off power quickly if there is a problem.
- The metal frame of docks should be bonded to connect all metal to the AC safety ground at the power source.
- Neighboring docks can also present a shock hazard. Make your neighbor aware of the need for safety inspections and maintenance. Marinas and docks should comply with the National Electrical Code (NEC) and NFPA standards.
- Check cords that are plugged into docks to make sure there is no broken casing or exposed wires.
- Regardless of the size of boat, maintenance of the electrical system should be done by a professional familiar with marine electrical codes.

- Boats with alternating current (AC) electrical systems should have isolation transformers or equipment leakage circuit interrupter (ELCI) protection, comply with ABYC standards, and should be serviced by an ABYC Certified Tech.
- Fuses are rated to protect the wire, not the appliance. If a fuse blows continuously, it should NOT be replaced with a larger one just to keep it from blowing again — something else is wrong. It needs checked out.
- Have your boat's electrical system checked at least once a year. Boats should also be checked when something is added to or removed from their systems.
- If you are swimming and feel a tingle, get out of the water as soon as possible. It may be electricity leaking into the water. Swim away from potential sources of electricity.
- If someone is suffering from an electric shock, do not enter the water to rescue him or her. The water may be energized, and you could be shocked or electrocuted yourself. Shut off power at the source, and then use a fiberglass shepherd's hook to pull the victim out of the water.
- If you are still wet when you are back on shore, do not touch electronics, including radios and lights. Wait until you are dry.

The Energy Education Council is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to promoting electrical safety and energy efficiency. Established in 1952, the Council serves as a forum for diverse utility and energy organizations to collaborate on the mutually vital issues of efficiency and safety. Learn more at:

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