

Year-round gift ideas for fishermen

Hopefully all your gift requests were fulfilled during the holidays, but if you are still looking to update your safety gear, here's a list of items to consider. The following make excellent gifts for fishermen at any time of year.

Let's start at the bottom. Have you looked at your boots recently? Is there plenty of tread to insure secure footing? Not only for the long days on the water but for climbing from boat to boat while mooring, while checking the status of your boat in the harbor during the next wild nor'easter, and for chipping the ice from the wheelhouse and rigging.

If not, don't wait. Head to your marine supply store or local outfitter and pick up a new pair. Staying on your feet is a good way to stay out of the water and to prevent injuries associated with falls.

Clothes

Now, how about the rest of your clothes? Hypothermia is a significant risk for fishermen because they are exposed to cold weather, wet conditions, and wind.

Warm clothes are a prerequisite for winter fishing and good insurance against unpredicted storms. Make sure to have — and wear — proper layers of loose fitting clothing made of cotton, wool, or state-of-the-art fabric for outdoorsmen, including socks, pants, sweaters, gloves, and hat.

PERFORMANCE COUNTS

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And remember, the risk of hypothermia goes up with age, prolonged exposure to cold, failure to eat a balanced diet, and drinking alcohol before going out or while outdoors.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), El Niño or El Niña will not play a big role in this year's winter, and this generally means more uncertainty in the weather forecasts.

The good news is that, on Oct. 1, NOAA launched a new National Digital Forecast Database that provides updated forecasts at both national and local levels. Visit www.noaa.gov to check it out.

GPIRB vs. EPIRB

Marine communications equipment is constantly being improved. Among the latest innovations is the GPIRB, a Global Position-Indicating Radio Beacon with GPS capability that can provide the location of your vessel to within 50' of your position on the water.

As reported at the web site www.boatsafe.com/nauticaknowhow/GPIRB.htm, the GPIRB "is the first of a new generation of emergency beacons."

This instrument combines use of the COSPAS-SARSAT satellite rescue system with Global Positioning System (GPS) satellites. The improvement over a standard EPIRB is that the GPIRB will find its own position and transmit it

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Theresa Dallhoff graphic

directly on 406 MHz, the usual EPIRB frequency.

A full discussion entitled "Integration of a Global Positioning System Receiver in an Emergency Position-Indicating Radio Beacon" is available on the web at www.rcc-net.org/rcc/rddocs/gpsep.

According to one source, the price of this new unit could be in the vicinity of \$1,300. However, the precision with which this equipment operates means minutes and possibly hours saved during a rescue event. Even those vessels that are not required to carry EPIRBs would do well to invest in a GPIRB.

VHF go high-tech

VHF radios also have exciting new features. These include GPS input capability that enables the crew to secure its precise latitude and longitude and broadcast it over VHF.

At least one manufacturer has added a "SAME weather alert" capability feature that takes advantage of the improved forecasting available from NOAA. SAME stands for "specific area message encoding."

Integrated or built-in digital selective calling (DSC) is now available on VHF. Radios with DSC have a nine-digit FCC identification number called a "maritime mobile service identity," or MMSI.

The radio and number are registered with the Coast Guard. This allows the radio to send automatic "mayday" calls — much the same way an EPIRB does — and continue to transmit when the skipper and crew are disabled.

The MMSI can be used for private ship-to-ship calling similar to cell phone calls and can be monitored on Channel 70. The Coast Guard is expected to have the capability to monitor Channel 70 in all areas by 2005-2006. Commercial ships over 300 tons are already required to monitor Channel 70.

VHF radios with these enhancements are still quite inexpensive and can be purchased for \$150-\$300, not including antenna.

FISH SAFE:

- Make sure your boots have ample tread.
- Wear layers of warm clothing.
- Update your EPIRB to a GPIRB.
- Consider the purchase of a VHF with high-tech positioning and calling features.

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