Guidance on Prop Guards

For

RYA Recognised Training centres

Note: This guidance is provided specifically for RYA recognised training centres. Separate guidance on prop guards for recreational boaters is available on the "Regulations and Safety" section of the RYA website.

Prop guards have always been the subject of wide debate. Despite this there is very little data to support an objective analysis of their merits and their drawbacks. This guidance is provided specifically for RYA recognised training centres operating under the various safety guidelines provided by RYA Training and in the context of the provision of training and / or safety boat cover through the use of properly trained instructors and coxswains.

Prevention is better than cure. Essentially, the most effective way of avoiding prop strike injuries is by preventing a situation in which a person comes anywhere near a propeller in the first place. The RYA therefore believes that the focus should be on following several basic and essential good practices, including:

- Keep a proper look out at all times
- Check the area around the engine for hazards before starting the engine
- Use a kill cord whenever the engine is running
- Operate at a speed appropriate to the conditions
- Stop the engine when dealing with a person or people in the water
- OR stop the engine when there is a risk of contact with someone who is in the water
- Ensure passengers and crew are aware of the need to maintain good handholds whilst under way
- Communicate changes in direction or speed to passengers
- Warn passengers when approaching wash or areas of rough water
- Warn passengers of the hazards associated with falling in, in particular prop strike

RYA Recognised Training Centres operating under the required guidelines and following such essential good practices should minimize the risk of prop strike.

The RYA does not require its training centres to fit and use prop guards. However, we do recognise that due to their specific operating areas or additional operations they may undertake, some RTCs may choose to fit prop guards.

In making the decision on whether or not to fit a prop guard the owner / operator should take into account many factors, some of which include:

- Prop guards on some engines may affect the manoeuvring characteristics of the vessel which may cause problems when the vessel is being used for safety boat duties.
- The fitting of a prop guard will reduce the acceleration and performance of an engine which will in some cases impact on the ability of this craft to assist a casualty in an emergency or to transport a casualty to shore.
- There has been some suggestion that prop guards can cause damage to gearboxes and prop shafts. The fitting of prop guards to some engines may have implications with the warranty for those engines. This question should be explored directly with your manufacturer or dealer.
- Prop guards are designed either to protect the propeller from damage, protect people from being injured or in some cases, both. You should be very clear on what you are trying to achieve if fitting a prop guard and ensure that the device you are fitting is suitable for its intended use. At present there is little data available to assist in making this judgement.

Ultimately, the question of whether to fit a prop guard or not is one which will be made by the RTC principal and will take into account factors such as the type of vessel you operate, the area in which you operate and the purpose for which you use it. However, in making your decision you should ensure that the preventative measures listed above remain your primary safety mechanism.

In the event that you do elect to fit a prop guard this should be seen as nothing more than a “last resort” in case all other measures have failed. You should only fit a prop guard having made a full assessment of the impact it will have on your vessel and the operation for which you intend to use it.

RYA Training

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