## What to Expect on Deployment of a Life-Raft



On smaller commercial and private vessels an inflatable life-raft is usually launched by throwing or pushing the entire container or valise overboard and pulling its lanyard to initiate the inflation mechanism.

At least 8 metres of painter line will need to be pulled out from the container of either life raft type before this action activates a compressed gas cylinder which inflates the various air chambers that make up the life raft. The life raft will inflate quickly, with excess gas gushing out of the safety relief valves. A common initial reaction is that there is a fault with the life raft, but in fact all life raft cylinders carry much more compressed gas than the life raft actually needs for full inflation. This excess gas is discharged from the safety valves and is evidenced by a whistling sound.

The sea anchor (drogue) will stream automatically on deployment with some life raft types and on others it will need to be manually set on boarding - it will lay folded on the floor. The drogue will hold the raft up to the wind and waves and significantly reduce the chances of capsize. It should also tend to keep the raft's opening to the lee of the weather.

After inflation, both the exterior locator flashing strobe light and interior illumination light will activate automatically. After boarding both lights are individually controllable by switches on the battery pack.

A raft is designed to inflate the right way up - because of the weight of the compressed gas cylinder and equipment pack - but there is a small chance that it may inflate upside down. It may be possible to right an upside-down life raft from the vessel, but if that fails, it will need to be done from the water with the aid of the instructions following later in this manual.

When crew members are ready to board, they should remove shoes and sheath sharp objects. The golden rule of survival is to stay dry. Try to step straight into the raft from the stricken vessel. But circumstances may see survivors in the water and the need to board from the water.



Some people may find it difficult, without assistance, to get over the high freeboard of the buoyancy tubes even with the aid of an entrance ramp or ladder and support bridle. If possible, more able survivors should enter the life raft first and assist others, including with the aid of the rescue quoit and line thrown to survivors more distant to the life raft.

On entry, the life raft's emergency equipment pack will be found securely lashed to one side of the life raft's interior. Loose items, including rations, flares and torch are contained within this heavy duty nylon case with zipper closure to prevent loss. Paddles, bailer, rescue quoit and safety knife are individually tethered or stowed in dedicated pockets on the buoyancy tubes for quick access at all times after boarding.

Once all crew are safely aboard, it will be necessary to disconnect the painter and paddle clear of the stricken vessel. If fitted, and as soon as possible, erect and deploy the radar reflector and the Search and Rescue Radar Transponder (SART) according to instructions within their stowage cases. The radar reflector and SART along with retro-reflective panels on the body of the life raft will greatly assist detection by search vessels and aircraft. A check to see that the sea anchor is streaming correctly should occur promptly and remains an ongoing priority to oversee. The sea anchor will significantly reduce drift and capsize potential.

When the life raft is fitted with an inflatable floor, this will need to be manually inflated with the aid of the hand bellows, located within the life raft's equipment pack. The inflation/topping up valve is specially marked on the life raft's floor. The other life raft floor type consists of composite aluminium, cellular foam and rubber underside and no further action is required. In both cases, the insulated floor will offer greater seating comfort and lessen the effects of cold ingress from the water below.

Whenever possible, survivors should place themselves around the perimeter of the life raft – to increase stability and reduce overturning potential in rough weather.

Thereafter maintaining the life raft, familiarising everyone with the contents of the emergency pack, watching for rescuers and achieving best possible comfort levels for all on board will become the ongoing routine.

## Abandoning Ship is a Harrowing Experience

There is no doubt that a vessel emergency that sees survivors' take to a life raft is an extremely stressful undertaking for all on board. Some survivors may also suffer shock reactions where they impulsively abandon all hope rather than strive for survival. Those survivors should be vigorously supported and offered encouragement. In reality the situation is far from hopeless as modern life rafts are designed and equipped to save all those on board. Thankfully, they have proved their worth on countless numbers of occasions.