

Consider More Than Price When Purchasing Safety Equipment

A new boat owner outfitted the six life jackets on his boat with lights. He purchased the cheapest USCG-approved lights on the market. Several months later, four of the six lights had failed while just sitting, unused, on the boat. Fortunately, no life was lost since the life jackets were not needed during this time. However, this serves as an example of unfortunate complacency about survival equipment.

When buying a car, home, stocks or many other items, people often research their purchases, seeking the best value for their money. Often little effort is put into researching safety and survival equipment, however. As a result, too many survival equipment purchases are based only on price. Few people would buy the cheapest car, house or stock. But, when it comes to equipment that people depend upon to save their lives, some will buy the cheapest.

Here is a real-life example of the perils of buying the cheapest product. When 406 EPIRBs were first required on fishing vessels, a fishermen's cooperative bought 100 EPIRBs. They chose a brand because it was the least expensive by a few dollars. They had been warned that the manufacturer they were buying from was foreign-based and new to this field. Regardless, one hundred fishermen ended up with this low cost brand. Within two years, the plastic rods holding the EPIRBs in place were breaking. EPIRBs were falling onto decks, causing false alarms.

To contact the company about the failures, a call to Europe was needed. Then, the company changed ownership and name, making it even more difficult to track down. So, some people started

replacing the defective plastic rod with a metal rod, disabling the float-free mechanism. Then, a battery replacement problem developed with this brand. Many fishermen finally ended up spending an additional \$1,500. to buy an entirely new 406 EPIRB. All this because they originally got "a really good deal."

The people who bought these troublesome, low-cost EPIRBs, bought them only to meet a

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requirement. They assumed they were never going to really need them. However, the first guideline when purchasing survival equipment is, **ASSUME IT CAN HAPPEN TO YOU.** Casualties happen to the best and brightest mariners. Fishing is a high risk occupation. Believe the statistics, or just add up the number of people you know who have been lost. The longer you work or play on the water, the greater your chances of needing reliable survival equipment.

The most expensive equipment is not necessarily the best either. Price should *never* be the only factor determining a marine safety equipment purchase. Instead, **ASK AROUND.** Fishermen seldom buy an engine or fishing gear without talking to other people about various products. Give safety equipment purchases the same scrutiny.

Question survival equipment sales representatives. Do they really know about their product or are they just selling a brand they happen to have in stock? Ask about the sellers' background. Are they outdoor people and boaters who have tried their own

products? Talk to people in the safety profession, including safety trainers. Trainers have seen a lot of equipment in use during training and can point out strong and weak features. On the other hand, beware of safety trainers and professionals who forcefully insist that only one brand is always best.

Choose equipment from a **REPUTABLE COMPANY.** The fly-by-night special is probably not the product you want your life to depend on. Find out how long a company has been in business. What is their long-term commitment to the safety business? Are they likely to still be in business when your equipment needs servicing or repair?

Finally, when buying equipment, ask: **DOES IT LOOK LIKE THE EQUIPMENT IS BUILT TO WORK AFTER IT FALLS OFF THE BULKHEAD AFTER BEING HIT BY A WAVE?** Emergencies often happen during extreme conditions. Survival equipment needs to stand up to these conditions. Before buying a piece of equipment, imagine it being slammed into a steel deck. A product that looks like it would survive the fall, it is probably a better choice than the one that looks unlikely to survive even a trip home from the store.

Purchasing good survival equipment often depends on attitude. Always remember that you never know how your day is going to end. With this attitude, you will put more effort into choosing the equipment that you are depending upon for your life!