23 April, 2020

To my fellow mariners,

With the start of boating season in British Columbia now well underway, I know many of you are heading out on the water as an alternative to other outdoor activities that are currently restricted or discouraged, or are planning to use your vessel as a way to self isolate. As part of a long and proud tradition, mariners have always come to the aid of others on the water. Today, on behalf of the Canadian Coast Guard, I am asking all mariners to once again come to the aid of others by avoiding non-essential trips and consider staying close to home to save lives as our country works to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Already this year, Coast Guard has responded to a greater number of Search and Rescue calls in British Columbia as compared to the same time last year. With each response, our Search and Rescue specialists put themselves at risk of exposure to COVID-19 and use precious supplies of Personal Protective Equipment that is also much needed by critical care workers. Coast Guard continues to work 24 hours a day, seven days a week to keep mariners safe, but unnecessary boating trips increase the risk to our operations and our ability to respond.

You should also be aware that most small coastal communities in British Columbia have closed their villages to visitors to protect their families. Your presence in an area could have a serious impact on vulnerable community members, and if you were to get sick, strain the limited health care resources of that community. If you choose to travel or self isolate, you may not have access to fuel, supplies and other services in those communities.

And finally, if you have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19 or are feeling sick, please don't get on a boat. Home and within close proximity to health care is the best place you can be right now. If you are on the water and become involved in a marine emergency, please let Coast Guard know if you have any flu-like symptoms when you call for assistance so we can best protect our crews and inform any vessels of opportunity who respond.

As both a professional and a recreational mariner, I know how tempting it is to get on your boat and escape the restrictions we are all currently living under. But we are also navigating uncharted waters right now, and it is up to all of us to do our part to reduce the spread of COVID-19 so that one day soon, we can fully enjoy the peace and beauty of coastal British Columbia. I know that seafarers are both self-reliant and fairly cautious. It's time to take those principles to heart, keeping an eye to being on the water without impacting others.

Stay safe, stay healthy.

Roger Girouard
Assistant Commissioner, Western Region
Canadian Coast Guard