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Boater removes battery from his smoke alarm and has a close brush with death

'Fit a smoke alarm and keep it working', is the blunt advice from the Boat Safety Scheme following a recent boat fire where the owner was potentially only seconds away from death.

The live-aboard boater had no early warning when he awoke in the middle of the night to find his home was filling rapidly with toxic smoke. The solid fuel stove in the saloon had set fire to the boat's lining and he had previously removed the battery from his smoke alarm.

By the time he had realised what was happening, he had to crawl out of the boat on his chest to keep below the level of the smoke. In less than a minute after his escape, flames filled the cabin as he stood on the towpath calling 999.

According to the Fire Kills campaign, toxic smoke will affect your ability to breathe and cause you a drowning sensation; with just two to three breaths of toxic smoke in a boat fire, you could be unconscious, so every second counts when you need to escape.

BSS Manager, Graham Watts said: 'Whilst this boat owner has lost all his possessions, luckily he still has his life. Boaters have died from smoke poisoning when fires developed as they slept and a working smoke alarm could have alerted them to escape.'

'If you sleep aboard, give yourself a chance to escape a fire, fit a smoke alarm and test it weekly when you're using the boat.'

'Also if your alarm regularly goes off when you're cooking, replace it with one that has a hush button that stops the alarm from sounding while you make the toast or fry the bacon! These alarms are cheap and easy to buy from online suppliers, DIY shops and supermarkets.'

'The alarm of choice is an optical alarm with a long-life battery, a hush button, and one that is certified as meeting either BS 5446:2000 Part 1, or BS EN 14604:2005, so it should carry a 'Kitemark' or 'horseshoe' certification mark. Also, if you can't hear it in the saloon while you are in the sleeping quarters, buy two, one for each end of the boat.'

There are guidelines for choosing and installing an alarm on boat on the BSS fire safety website www.boatsafetyscheme.com/fire.

-ENDS-

Notes for editors

The BSS is a public safety project owned jointly by British Waterways and the Environment Agency. At least 14 other navigation and harbour authorities have also adopted it. The navigation authorities' purposes for the Scheme are to help reduce the risks of fire, explosion and pollution on small craft. This is done by promoting fire safety and pollution avoidance advice to help boat owners keep themselves and their crews' safe as well as regular examination of fuel systems, gas systems, electrical systems and appliances.

The BSS examination and certificate BSS certificates have a life span of four years. Navigation authorities using the Scheme usually require a valid BSS certificate at the time of licensing, registration, and toll renewal or similar. The certificate is issued to boat that is found to be compliant with all the BSS requirements relevant for that boat. These can be found in the BSS Essential Guide which can be freely downloaded or read on www.boatsafetyscheme.com. The compliance check is carried out by an authorized, independent practitioner known as a BSS examiner.