

COOK STOVE SAFETY

Or...

“Why does my raingear smell like smoke?”

By Tim Clepper

Commercial fisherman, do you do more than boil water on your diesel oil cook stove? If you're like most fishermen, this mostly nondescript metal box is used to heat your boat. And on cold and rainy days, it's the only way to dry wet rain gear and work gloves. As long as these types of stoves are getting fuel, they'll burn forever. That's usually where the problems begin.

Ask yourself how many times have you left the stove burning unattended? How many rain coats or jackets are stacked on hooks just inches from the stove? Is there a fire extinguisher mounted close by that's not being used as a coat rack?

I think most fisherman with installed diesel oil stoves can relate to at least one of these conditions. Stove fires are devastating and could result in a total loss of the vessel. These fires are fed by the supplied fuels and anything nearby that'll burn; like the nice dry wood work in the cabin, plastic covered paneling and don't forget the rain gear drying on the hook next to the stove.

What can you do to live safely with your stove? Well the obvious of course, don't stow material that can easily ignite too close to the stove. Keep a type ABC fire extinguisher mounted near the stove, hopefully of a size that would allow you to put the fire out, not make it mad. A size II or higher is recommended. Clean the stove as per the manufacturer's recommendations, and never under any circumstance attempt to alter or modify the stove controls or stove carburetor. Improperly installed stoves and smoke stacks have been known to start fires. Good housekeeping especially around the stove should be practiced by everyone. Keep flammable liquids such as cooking oils, pressurized aerosol cans securely stowed away from the stove; the wake of a passing vessel could cause unsecured gear fall onto the hot stove top.

Diesel oil fueled stoves have carburetors that are equipped with built in safeties. These safeties shut the fuel supply down in the event of a fire or high temperatures. There are also devices on the market that are externally installed on the fuel lines that will not allow fuel to reach the burn pot when the stove reaches dangerously high temperatures, usually around 136 degrees F. Check with your local boat supply store for these items. Most come in two types, auto pulse and day tank supplied fuels and can be easily installed. Prices vary and depend on which type your stove takes. Whatever the price, if it saves your boat it's worth it!

But the most important safety precaution is to never leave the stove burning unattended. Fires start small and double their size in 60 - 90 seconds; in the cabin of a small power troller or gill-netter that may be just enough time for the fire to burn out of control with no hope of saving the boat.

Don't let your boat go down in a "Viking Funeral" by ignoring your diesel oil stove. Keep it clean and un-cluttered and don't leave raingear or wet clothes hanging too close for too long. And by all means, never leave the stove unattended!

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