

## A REALISTIC LOOK AT PYROTECHNIC FLARES VERSUS THE SOS DISTRESS LIGHT

Written by Mike Negley



Photo courtesy of Florida resident, Mike Negley.

This piece of emergency equipment should be a no-brainer. Until Weems & Plath's SOS Distress Light was available, most boat owners bought pyrotechnic flares because they are required by the U.S. Coast Guard and they are the least expensive option. No one really thinks they will need them and if they did, they probably have never tried to ignite one.

Here is how it works: you first find them in the boat and hope they have not fallen in the bilge, are not out of date, or will actually ignite. Next, you must read the directions and look at all of the pictures printed on the flare (\*keep in mind this is a crisis where seconds count).

The directions explain the igniting process and specifically say to stand with your back to the wind and hold the flare downward over the side of the boat. This takes two hands which leaves you no way to hold onto the boat, which if not underway, will be side to the wind and rocking seriously. With luck you get the flare ignited and you hold it up in the air, but what the directions don't tell you is that the red-hot slag from the burning flare will run down onto your hand and arm, so along with the expletives you shout, you must either hold the flare upside down outside of the boat or you drop it; but if you drop it, does it fall inside or outside of the boat? If the flare falls inside, will it fall next to the fuel tank (at which point you will have a giant flare)? If you manage not to drop it, the flare only lasts 3-minutes and if it is being held upside down, who will see it?

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Flare packages contain four flares, which gives you one extra that can be used as a practice model, but who actually thinks of this? Then the typical retail cost of a set of four flares is \$80 and they expire 42 months after they're manufactured. So by the time you pick them up at the store, this could easily be a much shorter time. And if you buy direct from the manufacturer, you must pay the extra Haz-Mat shipping fee, but even then, there is still no guarantee they will be any fresher than the ones on the shelf. If the Coasties inspect your boat and the flares are out of date, the fine is \$150 and if there are no flares on board, the fine is much higher. Finally, there is the problem of what to do with expired flares – no one wants to take expired flares anymore!

Now let's look at the Weems & Plath SOS Distress Light – their electronic flare is visible for up to 10-nautical miles, involves NO danger to use, never expires, requires no disposal, operates on 3 C cell batteries, operates for up to 60-hours on one set of batteries, fully meets USCG compliances, flashes the SOS sequence in Morse Code, is waterproof and floats with the light facing up, and it comes with the required daytime distress flag. And the cost is only \$99.95.

