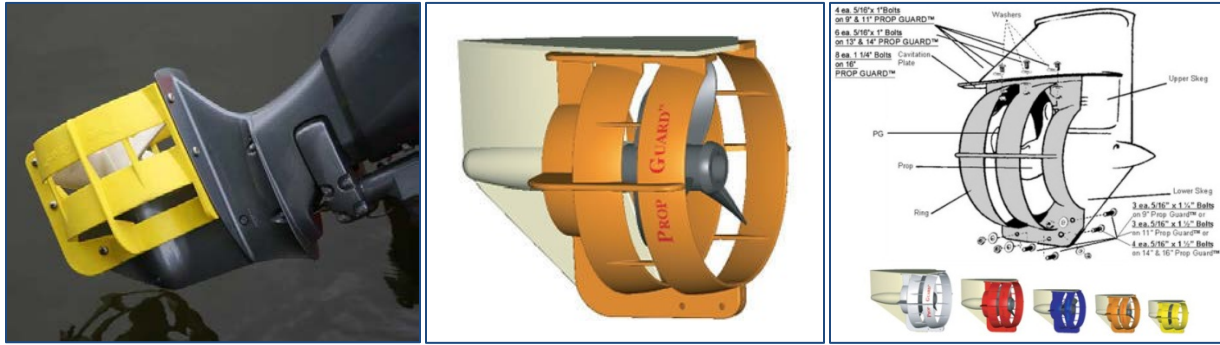


Outboard Motors Safety: Propeller Guards

By Gowrie Group: Whitney Peterson & Kellie Crete



Experienced boaters know that things happen fast. A typical recreational propeller can travel from head to toe on a person in the water in less than one tenth of a second. Propeller guards can add an important margin of safety for boats operated around children, sailors, and swimmers.

In 2012, according to the US Coast Guard's annual recreational boating accident statistics, there were 181 propeller accidents, 187 propeller injuries, and 19 propeller fatalities. In 2011, there were 35 propeller fatalities. Gowrie Group, as managers of The Burgee Insurance Program, recommends that propeller guards be considered for all outboard motors used around small boat sailors, children, and swimmers. In many cases this includes boats used for teaching junior sailing, running small boat regattas, and supporting recreational watersports (skiing, tubing, swimming, etc).

Propeller guards are typically constructed of polypropylene, and can be affixed to an outboard motor using bolts. Prop Guard, a popular manufacturer of propeller guards, includes the 9 bolts needed for the installation with the guard. Because the unit is made of polypropylene, there is no rust or corrosion and there are no moving parts, no hydraulics or electrics.

Dave Eickmeyer, an advocate for propeller guards from Australia recently said, *"The kids are being taught to capsize boats and they love being in the water. You starting thinking to yourself, just one little mistake of the coach or support boat driver believing he is doing the right thing by reversing in or coming in close to a kid and that kid not anticipating, ends up with a hand or a foot or a body into the propeller."*

"Yes, there is marginal decline in top end speed [when using prop guards], but our instructors and coaches don't need to be going 40 mph. They spend 90 % of their time while teaching going idle speed or in semi-displacement mode. When they do need to go fast, we don't mind the difference between going 35 mph vs. 40mph. It is worth it for the safety gain," shared Kim Hapgood, of SailNewport. Sail Newport has a fleet of 22 powerboats ranging from 13' Whalers to 24' RIBs, with engines from 15hps to 90hps.

Standards and regulations for using propeller guards continue to be implemented and expanded:

- The 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2012 London Olympics required all coach boats, media boats, and race official boats at the **Olympic yachting competitions** to have propeller guards. Prop Guards was the selected brand for both the 2008 and 2012 Olympics.

- The U.S. Coast Guard requires **lifeboats** to have propeller guards.
- The U.S. Code of Federal Regulations requires propeller driven **rescue and fast rescue boats** to have propeller guards.
- Many **SOLAS Tenders** that are used to serve mega yachts are now being manufactured with propeller guards.

Additional Smart Safety Tips for Outboard Motor Operation:

- Before starting your boat, check the area around your propeller.
- Ensure the driver has the engine cutoff switch attached to him or herself.
- Never approach a swimmer, water skier, or anyone in the water in reverse.
- Never put the boat in gear if there is a nearby swimmer in the water or on the swim platform.
- Stop the engine when there is a risk of contact with someone who is in the water.
- Do not allow anyone to bow-ride, ride on the gunwales, or ride on pontoons of a RIB.
- Communicate changes in direction or speed to passengers.
- Use a spotter when towing skiers, tubes, or other water toys.
- Consider installing propeller guards on outboard motors operated around sailors, children, and swimmers.

Information about Propeller Guards:

Propeller Safety: www.propellersafety.com

Prop Guard Manufacturer: www.propguardmarine.com



The Burgee Program is the only comprehensive insurance program developed to meet the unique needs of yacht clubs, community sailing programs, schools, and associations. The program is endorsed by US Sailing, underwritten by Chubb, and managed by the marine insurance experts at Gowrie Group. Nearly 1,000 yacht clubs and sailing organizations in the United States have already chosen The Burgee Program so they can confidently run regattas, borrow boats, teach sailing, hold social events, weather storms - and keep their club, board members, flag officers, volunteers and employees well-protected. www.burgeeprogram.com or burgee@gowrie.com



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