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SEA PARTNERS: TO PRESERVE AND PROTECT

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Those of us, who work side by side with active duty and reserve personnel, recognize their dedication to protecting our shores. The role of the Coast Guard has always been protection and preservation. Among the charges protected by the Coast Guard is the mainstay of the global environment - our water. The Sea Partners Program was developed in 1994 to address the need to educate the public and raise awareness of the environmental deterioration of our seas and waterways. Sea Partners has traditionally been conducted by reserve members from the Marine Safety Offices. Auxiliarists in many areas have been involved from the beginning of the program. One of the new PQS's that will qualify Auxiliarists for the Auxiliary Marine Safety Insignia is Environmental Education Specialist – in other words – Sea Partners. Sea Partners is a challenging, exciting, and rewarding program to participate in. It is of vital importance and can also be a lot of fun. Public education, the goal of the Sea Partners program, is something with which many Auxiliarists are already actively involved. It is a natural progression to add environmental protection topics to our existing public education activities.

Water is finite. We cannot manufacture more than what currently exists. We are now facing a crisis in the quality of that water.

According to an October 2000 report from the World Resources Institute, by 2025 half the world's population will live in areas without enough water for agriculture, industry, and human needs. Programs like Sea Partners can make a difference in protecting this precious resource.

Sea Partners and Education

Sea Partners is about education. Our primary target groups are young people, recreational boaters, other waterways users and anyone living near coastal areas. We take our message to schools, science fairs, scout meetings, cadets, public gatherings, anywhere we have an audience regardless of age. The Sea Partners Program is enthusiastically received everywhere we go. In the San Francisco area, we have recently integrated the Sea Partners presentation into the San Francisco Bay United States Coast Guard Boats n Kids Team. Schools in particular are great audiences for Sea Partners. Teachers and staff love it because Sea Partners can be integrated into the existing environmental education curriculum. But the response of the children is the real reason we do this – and we do make a difference. We regularly hear that the school grounds are cleaner, the children are more responsive to pollution prevention, recycling efforts are more productive and the students make requests to attend clean up days as field trips after having a visit from the Sea Partner team.

And the effects are not short term; we are invited back each year to address new students and to reinforce the message.

Viewing the Future with Optimism

An important part of the Sea Partner presentation is optimism. Our message is not doom and gloom. Instead, we offer practical methods of pollution prevention and resource management that let people know how they can make a difference. We use a wide variety of visual aids to make our points. In the bay area we are fortunate to have access to a diorama, a working model of the bay, that is very popular with all age groups. Painting pollution (food coloring) on the mountains and raining on them (via spray bottles) gives a graphic picture of how pollution ends up in the waterways. We talk about how our watershed works to keep dirt from clogging up the streams and rivers and keeps the water healthy for all creatures that depend upon it. We teach that pollution is not just man made material but also the result of clear cutting timber, construction, open pit mining and plowing of fields. Of course we do not leave out the more obvious sources of pollution - oils, chemicals, sewage and garbage (particularly plastic).

Part of the fun of doing a Sea Partners presentation is the challenge of adapting our presentations to audiences from age 6 to 60 using the same visual aids. The first rule is to make your presentation interesting. Nothing is more boring than to doze through a monotone lecture on the dangers of plastic in the water. The presentation, particularly with youth, is interactive. We don't lecture. We question, we respond to questions, and we demonstrate. The tools we use are simple and inexpensive, many of them easily found in most kitchens - and very effective. Flat clear containers to place water in, a jar of vegetable oil mixed with cocoa powder (crude oil), a spray bottle of dispersant (soap and water or Simple Green) and absorbent pads. After asking how much oil would it take to cover a body of water the size of a football field (one cup or

less), we use these ingredients to demonstrate an oil spill. Using the flat clear container for water we pour some of our "crude" to show how far and how quickly it spreads. We then spray a dispersant to show that, instead of cleaning up the crude, soap only breaks it up and sends it to the bottom. I am continually amazed that most boaters believe that a dispersant eliminates oil. Then we show how an absorbent pad works, how to dispose of it, and how booms are used. A good ten-minute conversation with one small prop can impress adults as much as children.

Knowing your Enemy

The key to being a good Sea Partner is to know your enemy - pollution, point source and non-point source - and practical common sense methods of preventing it. We are educators not lecturers. If I don't have an answer, I say so. If I can find the answer, I will be prepared the next time I am asked. Read your Good Mate text and take the exam - also one of the qualifications for the Marine Safety Insignia. If you are teaching BS&S, incorporate Good Mate information into your classes. There are many environmental lessons we can incorporate into our existing PE efforts. The chapter on trailering is perfect for introducing the issue of aquatic nuisance species. The other key components are imagination, patience, adaptability and a few good props. State and county agencies are wonderful assets. They can often provide freebies such as fuel mitts, whistles, water bottles (reusable of course!), pencils, coloring books, dock walker kits and many other items to entice people to your booth or get your audience energized.

Right now we need more qualified Sea Partner instructors. Many areas are unable to honor all the requests they receive for Sea Partners from schools and agencies in the area. Contact your local MSO. Tell them you want to be a Sea Partner. They would love to hear from you. It is one of the most rewarding activities in which any Auxiliarist can become involved.