

Do's and Don'ts for Crowded

Launch Ramps

by Art Michaels

Suppose that every time you launched your boat, no one tied up the dock, and each time you retrieved your boat, the ramp was clear and you waited for your turn only momentarily, if at all.

Enjoying these circumstances isn't impossible. It just takes a little application of the Golden Rule and some launch ramp smarts when accesses are crowded. Use these six ideas to make launching and retrieving more efficient, safer and faster for everyone.

- Get to know your favorite accesses so that you can plan your launching and retrieving for maximum efficiency. Boaters tie up launch ramps because they don't realize that many access sites have specially built areas for launch preparation and for tie-down after retrieval, or they don't know where to park to make launch and retrieval preparations at accesses with no formal preparation areas. These spots are called rigging and derigging areas. They are usually adjacent to the ramp or very nearby. If we used these places routinely, more boaters could launch and retrieve, and a long line at the ramp itself could be shortened.
- Before you launch your boat at an unfamiliar access, look the place over and decide how you're going to launch and retrieve for maximum speed and safety. Is there a dock at which you can get your gear ready immediately after launching and where, out of the way of those who are launching and retrieving, you can secure your equipment before retrieving? Will the wind or current make maneuvering your rig for launching and retrieving difficult? If you launch on the Delaware River, will a tide change make you alter your launching and retrieval plan?
- Some small accesses don't have formal places for rigging and derigging. If a launch site doesn't have rigging and derigging areas, prepare for launching in a parking space. As

soon as you retrieve your boat at this kind of access and get it on the trailer, attach the bow hook and make your way slowly to the parking area. There, away from others trying to launch and retrieve their boats, work with your equipment and get ready to leave. Remember that the ramp itself is only for launching and retrieving, not for preparing your boat and gear.

- Before you return to the ramp to retrieve your boat, put your tackle away, prepare mooring lines and get everything ready that's coming out of the boat for storage in your tow vehicle. Don't perform these tasks on the ramp. You won't tie up the ramp this way, and you'll get home faster. In addition, when you launch the next time, organizing your gear this way can help you get under way faster.
- If ramps have docks, where you can wait for friends or complete your boating preparations, use them instead of waiting on the launch ramp. You can also beach your boat on smooth shorelines at the launch site either to wait for friends to board or to wait your turn to retrieve your boat.
- Make a written checklist for launching and retrieving. You increase your efficiency by getting your gear ready for use and by storing items quickly. A routine governed by a checklist increases your efficiency and lets you spend the least amount of time at the ramp.

A checklist also reminds you to perform necessary tasks before launching, like putting the plug in and removing the transom tie-down straps.

Applying these ideas before you launch can make boating safer for you and others at the ramp. Using these ideas can also give you and other boaters more time on the water. Crowded launch sites don't always have to mean long waits and frayed nerves. It's up to us. ☐