

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

U. S. COAST GUARD AUXILIARY

America's Volunteer Lifesavers SM

SpeedGram

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The Department of Education is pleased to announce the introduction of America's Boating Course (ABC). The course has been developed and produced in a joint venture with the United States Power Squadrons (USPS). ABC is a basic boating safety course and is approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA). The USPS has the same procedures and opportunities outlined in this SpeedGram.

Each Flotilla is being supplied a complementary copy of ABC, which includes the CD and textbook.

OVERVIEW

ABC is a robust course. The material goes beyond the basic NASBLA requirements and provides the student with a comprehensive foundation on which to start a boating career or update boating knowledge. The course uses state-of-the-art graphics and technology and will have wide appeal to all age groups.

ABC consists of a well-designed 80 page, full color textbook, as well as a CD containing interactive courseware and information for the boater. All course material is contained in both the textbook and the CD. This enables a student to use either the textbook or the CD or a combination of the two. The student will always receive both the textbook and the CD.

DISTRIBUTION

Distribution of the course will be in four ways:

- Distributed by the Flotilla as a classroom taught course
- Sold directly by the Flotilla to the student for home study
- Distributed by third party vendors such as boat stores, marine dealers, bookstores, and websites
- Distributed directly to students over the Internet

1. Flotilla Taught Courses: ABC is a terrific classroom course! While it may be taught in six to eight hours to satisfy NASBLA requirements, it is more likely to be taught in the eight to ten hour time frame. The interactive CD makes an exciting presentation possible for Flotillas that have an LCD projector. (A special version of the CD designed to support instructors will be available soon.) Shortly, there will also be PowerPoint and Overhead support for those instructors more comfortable with that technology or who do not have access to an LCD projector.

2. Flotilla Direct Sales: Flotillas are encouraged to market ABC in a variety of ways in addition to classroom-conducted courses. While each Flotilla should use its own judgment and creativity to market ABC, the following surely suggest themselves as viable options:

- Directly to students when performing VSCs
- At boat shows (when allowed)
- To marine dealers for resale/gifts to their customers
- Through media advertising
- To boating organizations, such as local boating clubs
- Through schools, fire, police, and marine law enforcement departments

3. Sales Through Third Party Vendors: We encourage widespread usage of ABC and will distribute the course through various national outlets. These outlets will include bookstores, national marine stores, discount stores, department stores, and many more large national outlets.

One of these outlets will be the ABC Website. We are working with computer search engine companies to direct those looking for a boating course to the ABC Web site (www.AmericasBoatingCourse.com). At the site they will see a demonstration and be able to order the course using a credit card.

We anticipate that this marketing effort will begin prior to the end of this year; however, we expect heavy sales volume during 2002.

Third party vendor sales are very important to Flotillas, as will be discussed later in this SpeedGram.

4. Sales on the Internet: In addition to sales from the ABC Web site, as described above, students will be able to register and take the course on-line. The on-line course will be exactly like the CD version and can be taken by the students at their own pace, with “bookmarks” to assist them in finding their place from one session to another.

It is anticipated that the Internet version will be on-line yet this year. Those taking the course on the Internet will receive the textbook and the CD.

The Internet distribution system will also have a major, positive effect for Flotillas as described below.

FLOTILLA PARTICIPATION IN FLOTILLA DIRECT SALES, THIRD PARTY AND INTERNET SALES

As mentioned, ABC is a NASBLA approved course. However, there are two NASBLA requirements that are NOT included in the textbook or the CD. That is, for students to receive NASBLA accreditation they must be taught state specific regulations and pass an examination (in our case a proctored examination). The ABC program is designed to point the student to a Flotilla or Squadron to receive the state regulation education and take the examination. What an excellent time for recruitment and/or enrollment in one of our other courses, including *On Water Training!* (Graduates of Auxiliary delivered or taught ABCs are eligible for OWT.)

In Flotilla-taught classes: For those students who take the course in one of our classrooms, the state regulations and the proctored exam will, quite naturally, be done as normal.

In Flotilla-direct sales: For those students who bought the course directly from an Auxiliarist outside of the classroom, the Flotilla will need to establish a short class to teach state regulations and give the proctored exam. This might be done in conjunction with a regularly scheduled classroom conducted ABC or in a separate session just for that purpose.

The student who purchases ABC is entitled to attend the state regulation session and take the exam at no additional charge. If others in the family, who have also taken the course at home, want to attend the state regulation class and take the exam, Flotillas are authorized to make a charge of \$5 per student. Family use of the course is one of ABCs strongest selling points and we expect there will be wide acceptance in the family market.

Third Party and Internet sales: For these students, there is a slightly different approach. Once the students complete the course, they will be asked to contact a Flotilla or Squadron for the state requirements and the exam. If the students know how to do this, they will make the call and the Flotilla or Squadron will provide the service.

If, on the other hand, the students don't know who to call, they will be prompted to call a toll free number (1-866-BOAT ABC). That number will be answered “ABC Central, how may we help?” The student will provide name, address, and phone number and be told that someone locally will be in touch.

ABC Central will transmit the prospect's information by e-mail to an ABC Coordinator in the appropriate District of both the Auxiliary and the USPS. The Coordinator will e-mail the prospect's information to the appropriate Flotilla Coordinator, who will see to it that a contact is made. **DON'T FORGET** – Since the same thing will be happening with the USPS, whoever reaches the "prospect" first will probably win the day!

These students will have a "Validation Coupon" attached to the CD envelope. (This coupon will not be included with courses purchased from Flotillas or Squadrons.) Each coupon will have a unique validation number. The Flotilla will collect the coupon and print the validation number on the exam answer sheet. It is important to, then, destroy the coupon, so as to prevent re-use of that number.

The answer sheet will be sent to ABC Central and result in a \$5 fee being paid to the Flotilla. (Specific instructions for this will be issued as soon as administrative systems are in place.) Family members wishing to take the test can be charged the \$5 fee.

So! This prospect, generated with no effort on the part of the Flotilla, will be worth at least \$5 and may become a new member and new student!

COMPUTER COMPATIBILITY

The CD will operate using either the PC or MAC platform. It is self-loading on the PC, but must be selected when using a MAC.

PRICING AND ORDERING

ABC is ordered like all other educational courses - through your Materials Officer system. The suggested, nationwide retail price for ABC is \$34.95.

THE TEST

Both the Flotillas and Squadrons will be administering the same fifty-question test. It is important that the test be a well proctored, closed book examination. If a state requires up to ten additional, state specific questions, then an equal number of questions (starting with question forty-one) on the exam may be deleted and the state questions inserted to make a total of fifty. If a state requires more than ten questions then any in excess of ten must be added to the fifty.

The standard Auxiliary answer key may be used for grading (except for the state questions).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Attached to this SpeedGram are several FAQs, which will help explain some of the history and rationale for this joint project.

SUMMARY

This SpeedGram may not address all of the questions you have. This is a new way of doing business, for both the Auxiliary and the Squadrons. We don't know all of the questions, never mind the answers; but we will all learn quickly, share our knowledge, change what doesn't work, and end up with what is truly **AMERICA'S BOATING COURSESM**.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. WHY DID WE WANT TO DO THIS? IS THERE A MARKET DRIVEN DEMAND?

- The Coast Guard tells us that there are almost 13 million registered recreational boats in the country. Add to this the thousands of non-registered boats and we may have as many as 50 to 60 million boaters on our waters.
- If both the Auxiliary and the Power Squadrons doubled current student numbers we might be, jointly, reaching a 10% market share! Many states have opted for mandatory education; a trend that is expected to continue.
- Mandatory education generally involves younger students. These students are accustomed to new education methods and technologies. Our traditional courses may not appeal to this market.
- There are many boaters, due to time constraints or personal preference, who will not (unless forced by law) take an instructor led class to learn more about boating safety. These groups have shown a desire to get the necessary education as quickly and easily as they can. ABC gives them what they want/need.
- Americans have become enamored with new technology in the educational environment. Almost all colleges, universities, and high schools have programs that supplement their present educational efforts with the use of CD/Internet courses. To not join this effort would see commercial companies, and/or others, providing such courses to the boating public.

2. WHY PARTNER WITH THE U.S. POWER SQUADRONS?

- There has been a the long standing desire on the part of both organizations to do some major joint venture work in boating safety education, in much the same vein as the *Vessel Safety Check*.
- Lacking such partnership, both parties would probably have developed their own separate CD/Internet programs, if for no other reason than not to be “left out in the cold” by the other. By joining forces we achieve economies of scale and have a superior product.
- USCGA and USPS are the two organizations with the greatest name recognition with the boating public. This substantial marketing strength will persuade marine stores, and other marine organizations, to carry and promote this course to the boating public.

3. WHAT ARE THE ECONOMICS?

- The Auxiliary Association and the United States Power Squadrons equally funded the Project. Pricing is designed to recapture the initial investments of both organizations and then become an important revenue source.
- Of immense benefit at the Flotilla level, in addition to having a modern classroom course, will be the ability to market the course directly to the boating public outside of the traditional classroom environment. This should generate an added income stream to Flotillas and without having to conduct the course!

4. WHAT ELSE IMPACTS THE FLOTILLAS AND THE AUXILIARY?

- We will be producing an income stream to both Flotillas and the Auxiliary Association that is not dependent on classroom-conducted courses!
- Flotillas will be called upon to aggressively follow up on leads generated by ABC sales. We will be in competition with the Squadrons to enroll the student with the Auxiliary for the proctored exam and the state information instruction. The same competition will be present to enroll the student as an Auxiliary member and/or in our more advanced courses. We will need to be very responsive!
- The Internet, and computer technology, in general, gives the Flotilla the ability to be more accessible to the boating public.
- Being on the Internet will provide us with greater opportunity to communicate just who we are and what we have to offer.