

Nuts-and-bolts for Headlamp Use Aboard

Our testers collected some practical advice on owning and using a headlamp on board a boat. While much of it is commonsense, we didn't see any harm in stating the obvious.

Safety: Do not look directly into an LED beam or shine it into someone else's eyes.

Gloves: The only lamps we could operate reliably with lined, cold-weather gloves were those with rotary controls (Pelican HeadsUp, Petzl Saxo, and Princeton Tec Corona) and UK Vizion, Black Diamond Icon, and Streamlight Haz-Lo.

Lanyard: A headlamp could simply fall or be blown off, so always attach a lanyard between it and your belt.

Night vision: Since flashlights turn dark to light, their impact on the night vision of the user or anyone nearby can be a serious side effect. Traditionally red lamps and filters have been used to preserve night vision. Advice from the American Ophthalmic Association: Dark-adapt or use red goggles before night sailing; avoid bright lights, or at least protect one eye; do not fixate centrally, but scan, and look 15-20 degrees to the side of the visual target; and regularly wear sunglasses on sunny days, especially on days of night sailing. To this we would add: Remember that your headlamp affects other people's night vision.

LITHIUM CELLS

A few flashlight manufacturers have issued some warnings: Use only certain brands of higher-powered lithium cells in lithium-powered headlamps, and do not to substitute lithium AA and AAA cells for alkaline cells, even in models where they're listed as optional. The problem is heat, leading possibly to a short-circuit and fire within the lamp housing. We urge readers to follow these recommendations.

All test lamps from Petzl and Streamlight came with these warnings. Other manufacturers provide regulator circuits and heat sinks to compensate, and therefore these warnings are not relevant.

Why bother with lithium cells at all? Flatter discharge curves, higher operating voltage, better cold-weather performance, lighter weight, and longer shelf life—all serious advantages. But they cost a lot more, too.

Next time you're shopping, check the prices of AA and AAA alkaline cells: the smaller AAA cells, which are half the AAs' weight, offer half the AAs' service life, and sell for more money—something else to consider in picking a headlamp. If you have an inverter to make AC power, you might want to consider a headlamp that's compatible with rechargeable batteries.