

Festival of Lights Boat Parade Best Practices

Methods for Lighting Your Boat

Generator - an easy method is to place a portable gasoline generator on your boat. You can power almost any number of lights and decorations, depending on the size of the generator.

This method works well if you want to use older incandescent (non-LED) Christmas lights, as they draw more power. Another successful technique involves the use of lighted Christmas lawn ornaments strategically placed around the boat. The main disadvantage of a generator is the noise they can make.

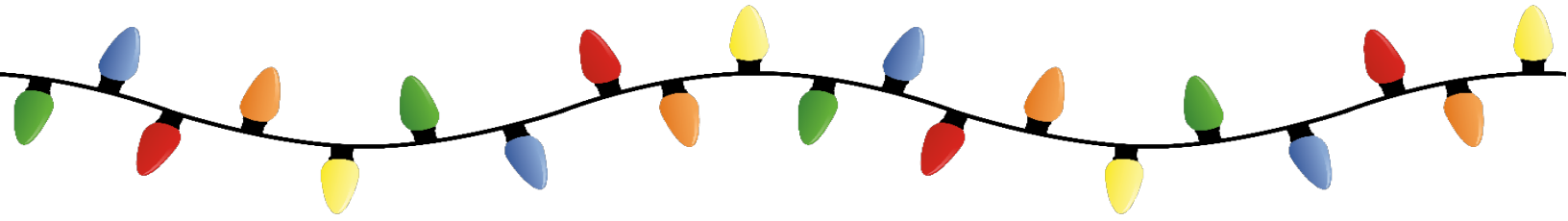
Power Inverter - a power inverter will invert the power from your battery's DC current to AC. Inverters can be purchased at many places such as Home Depot, Lowes and Harbor Freight Tools. Many have spring clamps that clip onto boat battery terminals, and can also plug into a power outlet. These work well for lighting the newer LED Chr string of 100 mini-Christmas lights, as a LED light uses about 7 watts of power. Add up the number of watts that you intend to power and obtain an inverter with extra wattage. An inverter is simple to use and uses the power your engine is already generating. It is quieter than a generator and boat engine running at the same time.

Twelve Volt Lights - 12-volt lights can be powered directly from your boat's battery or extra batteries can be used.

Old School - this most basic method involves Chinese lantern type decorations which you can light with flashlights. String them around your boat to create an effective and impressive presentation. Crew members can also dress in costume. Or, take advantage of modern technology and use light sticks to decorate yourselves and your boat. Your boat or vessel size can work in your favor as the possibilities are only limited by your imagination.

Test Your Lights

Test your lights. One of the biggest problems that boaters have is lights that don't shine brightly enough when the sun goes down and the parade actually starts. Light up a test area on the



boat, and then walk up the dock and look from a good distance to see how bright the lights are. If they fizzle instead of twinkle, you may need bigger bulbs or different lights.

Here are a few key points:

- In lighting your boat, never mount your lights so close to the water they'll become submerged.
- Keep holiday lights at least a foot above the water to allow for wakes and waves.
- Use only high-quality Underwriters Laboratory-approved outdoor-rated holiday lights and marine-grade 10 or 12-gauge extension cords on a separate breaker, plus compatible water-resistant connectors and sockets.
- Never exceed the number of strings of lights the manufacturer recommends connecting and use LED lights whenever possible for their energy efficiency and greater safety.

Lighting & Decor Options

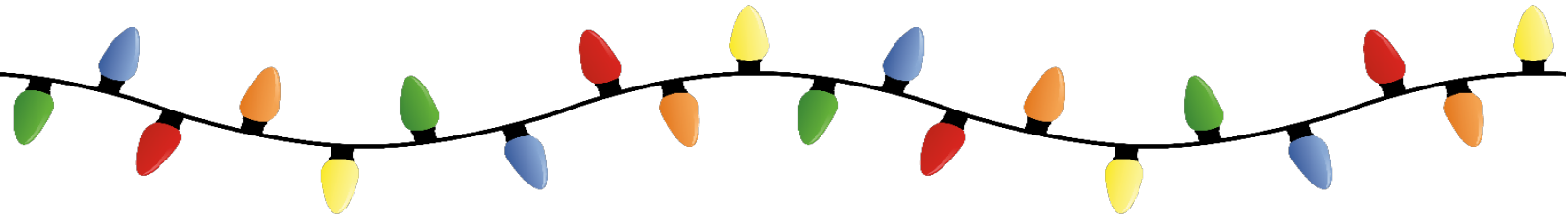
- A ton of options are out there for rope lights. We recommend waterproof. Spotlights are also great attention-grabbers to highlight people in costume, singers, dancers or giant foam cutouts (be sure to mount all lights at least a foot above the waterline, so they won't get hit with wakes and waves).
- Think small when you start out. You and some friends, a couple of Santa Claus, Mrs. Claus and elf costumes, and a spotlight can go a long way if you're smiling and waving to the crowd. Give each person a battery-powered LED string to hold, and then the crowd ashore will be able to see your friends waving too.
- If you plan to use inflatable displays like the ones made for home lawns, then tie wraps and bungee cords are your best friend. Tie everything down so that it doesn't impede the skipper's sightlines, and so that it doesn't go flying and become a hazard on the water for other boaters in the parade.

Add a Soundtrack

Bring the old boom box that's down in your basement. Water is great for a lot of things, including carrying sound over long distances. Crank up an old tape or CD of Christmas music on the boom box from 1984, and you have a ready-made dance party on your bow.

Work With What You Got

Work with the shape of the boat. Pontoons are more horizontal. When you're thinking about how to organize your onboard display, work to the boat's strengths in terms of shape. Think of the boat as the stage, and create shapes accordingly to fit it.



Themes

Use of a familiar theme will make the crowd roar in appreciation. **A large boat with huge elaborate decorations is not a requirement.** Entertaining boats full of people having fun will get the most enthusiastic ovations.

Participation is as easy as stringing some lights and putting Santa hats on your crew. Be as conservative, or imaginative as you dare, the ticket to this Parade is to share the Spirit of the Season with your crew and the crowds. Many parade veterans started out with just a few simple lights plugged into an inverter. After you and your crew have a great time on your first Parade, you can benefit from the experience of others.

Use The Crew as Decoration

It's easy to enhance the crew on your boat with the following items:

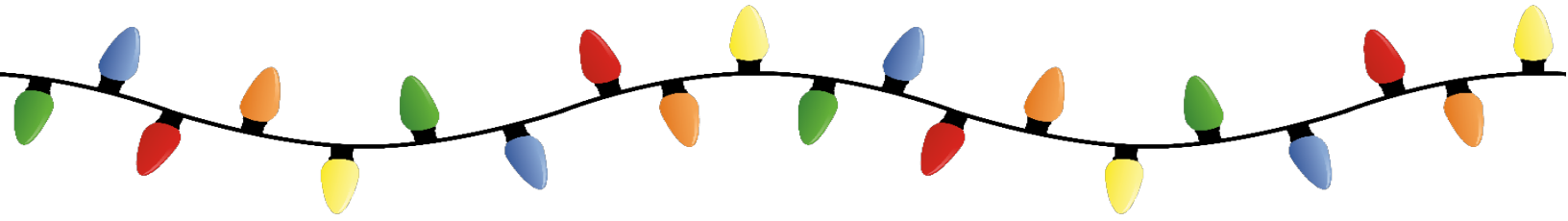
- Matching Santa or elf hats
- Santa costumes
- Angel costumes
- Matching sweatshirt colors for the crew – usually red or white
- Matching vests, ties, – be creative
- Battery powered LED light strings can be purchased for about \$7 and greatly enhance arm movement and waving to the crowd.
- Flashing lit tambourines are available on line for about \$5 each

It is essential that your crew be easily seen, however take care not to impede the captain's vision. This is mentioned numerous times and cannot be overstated.

Have a sufficient number of fire extinguishers in proper working order aboard. Decorations should be fireproof or fire-retardant. If using a portable generator, beware of carbon monoxide and have one person in charge of the generator and fire extinguisher.

Visibility is Critical

Make sure your decorations do not impede your ability to see where you're headed or to maneuver the boat. Keep spotlights and white lights off the helm and out of the captain's eyes. Red, blue or green are best forward of the helm. Before Parade night, test out your lights in the dark while at the helm for visibility.



Consider the number of crew aboard and make their costuming an integral part of your design. A simple and effective method is to have all crew members dressed in a single color, and use accessory items like Santa hats, illuminated hats, vests, large ties, belts, etc. ... to match your theme.

Music

Sound carries over the water. Music can be as simple as a boom box powered by “D” cell batteries, or the boats own stereo tied to speakers lashed to the deck which are easily protected by plastic bags. The crew can have some fun pantomiming to carols with fake microphones.

Carefully pick music to fit the theme and mood of you and your crew.

Place your speakers on the OUTSIDE where your audience will be able to hear the music. Use of plastic trash bags will protect conventional speakers from water spray damage.

If you need additional boating recommendations or questions, please feel free to call:

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