

A Case Study In Getting Results

By Caroline Ajootian

The BoatU.S. Consumer Protection Bureau has been watching your back for 40 years. Here's how we take care of business

When the phone rings or mail arrives at the BoatU.S. Consumer Protection Bureau, chances are the person at

the other end of the line needs help. A one-stop source for information about boat buying, safety defects, and marine manufacturers, the Bureau also serves as the Association's consumer advocate by mediating consumer disputes with the marine industry.

So, when BoatU.S. member Bill N. of Danville, Kentucky, emailed the Consumer Protection Bureau on September 24, frustrated in his attempts to get a faulty generator fixed, we went into action. Bill described how he'd been trying since 2003 to get Kohler to replace an exhaust pipe that had the potential to fail and possibly allow carbon monoxide to enter his boat's living space.

The Kohler generator on Bill's 1968 Nautiline houseboat was recalled in 2003 because the black iron wet exhaust pipe assembly could leak. The recall, U.S. Coast Guard campaign 030088T, involved thousands of Kohler generator models built between 1950 and 1989, and the remedy involved replacing the units' exhaust-pipe assemblies with stainless steel ones. The federal boat defect statute lasts for 10 years but, due to the danger of carbon-monoxide exposure, Kohler voluntarily initiated the recall campaign on the older generators.

Back to Bill N. He told BoatU.S., "In 2003, I informed Kohler that I had a

generator model that was recalled. They replied that they'd have someone look at the generator and correct the problem, but I never heard anything." His attempts continued over the ensuing years until

II, a Belgium-built 30-foot Etap sloop. Debbie's first step was to advise Bill of the dangers of carbon-monoxide poisoning and the need to have reliable CO detectors installed on his houseboat. She also gave

him the service bulletin (#SB-632) Kohler sent to the dealer, outlining the defect recall campaign. Contacts in the marine industry have made it possible for the Consumer Protection Bureau to create an archive of manufacturers' service bulletins and directives not normally released to the public.

Next, Debbie presented Bill's concerns to Kohler. Nearly 40 years of advocacy for boating consumers has allowed the Bureau to build up an impressive Rolodex of manufacturer contacts, so she was able almost immediately to obtain specific information about a Kohler shop near Lake Cumberland, Kentucky, where Bill's boat is kept.

Progress hit a snag when the Lake Cumberland company didn't respond to Bill's calls. Once again, Debbie enlisted Kohler's aid, phone calls were made and the exhaust pipe replacement was completed. Start to finish, the process took less than three weeks.



Debbie Schaefer (pictured) and Caroline Ajootian are relentless defenders of BoatU.S. Members' consumer rights.

a brief article in *BoatU.S. Magazine* (July 2008) described how the Bureau assisted another Kohler generator owner who had encountered similar difficulties getting recall repairs made. "I thought maybe you could help get this defect fixed," he said.

Enter BoatU.S. Consumer Affairs Specialist Debbie Schaefer. An avid sailor, she and her husband own *Cadence*

BoatU.S. Consumer Resources

■ Consumer Protection Database: Contains thousands of complaint reports, defect-recall notices, service bulletins, and reports from marine surveyors and mechanics. My.BoatUS.com/Consumer/database.aspx

■ Dispute mediation: BoatU.S. members can report complaints online (My.BoatUS.com).

com/Consumer/submitComplaint.aspx), by email to ConsumerProtection@boat.us.com, or by snail mail to BoatU.S. Consumer Affairs, 880 S. Pickett St., Alexandria, VA 22304.

■ The Bureau's free brochures, *BoatU.S. Guide to Buying & Selling a Boat* and *BoatU.S. Guide to Marine Service*, are available online: My.Boatus.com/Consumer/order.asp

■ For help, advice, and answers, call the Bureau, 703-461-2856. 📞

CONSUMER ALERTS

Federal laws require marine manufacturers to issue defect recall notices when boats or related equipment contain "defects which create a substantial risk of personal injury" or when they do not comply with boat manufacturing regulations.

For more information about these recalls, contact the manufacturers directly or go to the Coast Guard's web site, uscgboating.org, or call 202-267-0984. New recalls are listed monthly at the BoatU.S. National Recall Alert Registry, BoatUS.com/recall.

Mastercraft Boat Co., 423-884-2221 (Recall 080036T)

2003-09 Maristar 280 & X-80 (HINs MBCHHFT8K203 — MBCGSDP7J809): A flaw in the floor panel design creates the possibility that the fuel tank vent line may sever, allowing gas fumes (and possibly gasoline itself) to accumulate in the bilge. This recall affects all Maristar 280 and X-80 model Mastercraft boats, both single-engine and twin-engine, manufactured since the original date of production of this model in November 2002. Mastercraft will install a specially designed fuel tank bracket which will eliminate the issue and will also inspect and replace any vent hose and/or fuel pump that appears to be damaged or shows signs of undue wear. Refer to Mastercraft service bulletin 2008. DATE.SB-010.

Yamaha Motor Corp., 714-761-7710 (Recall 080031T)

2008 Yamaha 212X Sport Boats (FAT1100A-G/ALG) — If the bimini top is in the deployed position while the boat is underway; it could collapse and strike the operator and/or passenger and could obstruct the driver's view, which could result in an accident with the potential of personal injury or death to the operator, passengers or bystanders.



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