
Vessel Safety Check

(Formerly known as Courtesy Marine Examination - CME)

Vessel Safety Checks

The U. S. Coast Guard Auxiliary offers free safety checks to boaters who wish to be sure that their boats meet all Federal and State requirements. The Vessel Examiners who perform these checks are specially trained Auxiliarists who are kept informed on the latest legal requirements for boaters. Vessel Examiners have no legal authority - their goal is to prevent boaters from getting equipment-related citations and to prevent safety-related accidents. These safety checks are meant to be an educational experience. The Vessel Examiners will check for all required required items on board your boat and if everything is present and in good working order, they will award a decal to affix to your boat. If you wish, they will also gladly explain the reason for the various safety equipment requirements and explain how safety equipment works.

The following is an explanation of each item included in a Vessel Safety Check:

1. **NUMBERING:** The boat's registration number must be permanently attached to each side of the forward half of the boat. They must be plain, vertical, block characters, not less than three (3) inches high, and in a color contrasting with the background. A space or hyphen must separate the letters from the numbers. Place state tax sticker according to state policy. (e.g. **FL 1234 AB** or **FL-1234-AB**)
2. **REGISTRATION/DOCUMENTATION:** Registration or documentation papers must be on board and available. Documentation numbers must be permanently marked on a visible part of the interior structure. The documented boat's name and hailing port must be displayed on the exterior hull in letters not less than 4 inches in height. To be documented a boat must be 5 net tons or greater.
3. **PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICES (PFDs):** Acceptable PFDs (also known as Life Jackets) must be U.S. Coast Guard approved, in good serviceable condition, and of suitable size for the each person on the boat. Children must have properly fitted PFDs designed for children. Wearable PFDs shall be "*readily accessible*." Throwable devices shall be "*immediately available*." PFDs shall NOT be stored in unopened plastic packaging. For Personal Watercraft riders, the PFD must be worn and indicate an impact rating. Boats 16 feet or longer must also have one Type IV.
4. **VISUAL DISTRESS SIGNALS:** All recreational boats used on coastal waters or the Great Lakes are required to carry a minimum of three Coast Guard approved (current dated) day and night visual distress signals. Some signals (e.g. red flares) can serve for both day and night. Boats operating on inland waters should have some means of making a suitable day and night distress signal. The number and type of Visual Distress Signals is best judged by considering conditions under which the boat will be operating. Alternatives to pyrotechnic devices (flares) include:

Strobe Light Flashlight Lantern	Signal mirror Red or orange flags Hand signals
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5. **FIRE EXTINGUISHERS:** Every power boat requires a minimum of one Coast Guard approved "B-1" extinguisher. Only row boats and sailboats less than 16 feet with no mechanical propulsion are exempt. *NOTE: Fire extinguishers must be readily accessible and verified as serviceable.*

<i>Boat Length</i>	<i>No Fixed System</i>	<i>With Fixed System</i>
Less than 26'	one B-1	one B-1
26' to less than 40'	two B-1 or one B-2	one B-1
40' to 65'	three B-1 or one B-1 & one B-2	one B-2

6. **VENTILATION:** Boats with gasoline engines in closed compartments, built after 1 August 1980 must have a powered ventilation system. Those built prior to that date must have natural or powered ventilation. Boats with closed fuel tank compartments built after 1 August 1978 must meet requirements by displaying a "certificate of compliance." Boats built before that date must have either natural or powered ventilation in the fuel tank compartment.
7. **BACKFIRE FLAME ARRESTER:** All gasoline powered inboard/outboard or inboard motor boats must be equipped with an approved backfire flame control device.
8. **SOUND PRODUCING DEVICES:** To comply with Navigation Rules and for distress signaling purposes all boats must carry a sound producing device (whistle, horn, siren, etc.) capable of a 4-second blast audible for 1/2 mile. Boats larger than 39.4 ft. are also required to have a bell (see Navigation Rules).
9. **NAVIGATION LIGHTS:** All boats must be able to display navigation lights between sunset and sunrise and in conditions of reduced visibility. Boats 16 feet or more in length must have properly installed, working navigation lights and an all-around anchor light capable of being lit independently from the red/green/white "running" lights.
10. **POLLUTION PLACARD:** Boats 26 feet and over with a machinery compartment must display an oily waste "pollution" placard.
11. **MARPOL TRASH PLACARD:** Boats 26 feet and over in length must display a "MARPOL" trash placard. Boats 40 feet and over must also display a written trash disposal plan.
12. **MARINE SANITATION DEVICE:** Any installed toilet must be a Coast Guard approved device. Overboard discharge outlets must be capable of being sealed.
13. **NAVIGATION RULES:** Boats 39.4 feet and over must have on board a current copy of the Navigation Rules.
14. **STATE AND LOCAL REQUIREMENTS:** These requirements must be met before the "Vessel Safety Check" decal can be awarded. A boat must meet the requirements of the state in which it is being examined.

New York State requires an anchor and line for power vessels 16 ft and longer in length.

15. **OVERALL BOAT CONDITION: As it applies to this Vessel. Including, but not limited to:**

- **Deck free of hazards and clean bilge** - The boat must be free from fire hazards, in good overall condition, with bilges reasonably clean and visible hull structure generally sound. The use of automobile parts on boat engines is not acceptable. The engine horsepower must not exceed that shown on the capacity plate.
- **Safe Electrical and Fuel Systems:**
The **electrical system** must be protected by fuses or manual reset circuit breakers. Switches and fuse panels must be protected from rain or water spray. Wiring must be in good condition, properly installed and with no exposed areas or deteriorated insulation. Batteries must be secured and terminals covered to prevent accidental arcing. **If installed**, self-circling or kill switch mechanism must be in proper working order. All **PWC require** an operating self circling or kill switch mechanism.

Fuel Systems - Portable fuel tanks (normally 7 gallon capacity or less) must be constructed of non-breakable material and free of corrosion and leaks. All vents must be capable of being closed. The tank must be secured and have a vapor-tight, leak-proof cap. Each **permanent fuel tank** must be properly ventilated.

- **Safe Galley and Heating Systems** - System and fuel tanks must be properly secured with no flammable materials nearby.

RECOMMENDED AND DISCUSSION ITEMS: (Not required for the award of the "Vessel Safety Check" decal.)

- For the very best boaters, we recommend these additional items. Meeting these requirements reflects your concern for Boating Safety:
 - Marine radio
 - Dewatering device & backup
 - Mounted fire extinguishers
 - Anchor & line for area
 - First aid kit
 - Person in the water (PIW) kit (one extra wearable PFD and a throwable type IV PFD w/line)
 - Inland visual distress signals
 - Capacity / Cert. of Compliance
- Discussion Items are educational in nature and add value to the Vessel Safety Check program:
 - Accident reporting / Owner responsibility
 - Offshore operations
 - Nautical charts / Navigation aids
 - Survival tips / First aid
 - Fueling / Fuel management
 - Float plan / Weather & sea conditions
 - Insurance considerations
 - Boating check list
 - Safe boating classes