

PORTABLE FIRE EXTINGUISHER REQUIREMENTS FOR RECREATIONAL VESSELS

On 03 JUN 2020, BSX issued Policy Letter 20-01. The purpose of the letter was to provide additional guidance to Vessel Examiners on portable fire extinguisher requirements for recreational vessels. Specifically, the Coast Guard now uses a performance-based classification system that will impact recreational vessels constructed after August 22, 2016. Here is a link to BSX Policy Letters:

<http://agroup-bx.wow.uscgaux.info/content.php?unit=BX-GROUP&category=2020-policy-letters>

Most extinguishers already have Coast Guard approval and UL rating classification. This applies to all approved fire extinguishers installed on vessels constructed prior to August 22, 2016. These extinguishers can remain on recreational vessels if they are still serviceable. The new classification system requires portable and semi-portable extinguishers to be marked with a combined number and letter designation. The letter designates the general class of fire for which the extinguisher is suitable, and the number indicates the relative extinguishing potential of the device. The new requirements apply to vessels built after August 22, 2016 and focuses on requiring 5-B portable fire extinguishers in lieu of B-1 portable fire extinguishers (essentially 5 times the relative extinguishing potential).

Length (X feet)	Vessels built after August 22, 2016 (minimum number of 5-B portable fire extinguishers required*)	
	No fixed system in Machinery Space	Fixed System in Machinery Space
Less than 16	1	0
16 to less than 26	1	0
26 to less than 40	2	1
40 to 65	3	2

*One portable 20-B portable fire extinguisher may be substituted for two 5-B portable extinguishers

Length (X feet)	Vessels built before August 22, 2016 (minimum number of B-1 portable fire extinguishers required*)	
	No fixed system in Machinery Space	Fixed System in Machinery Space
Less than 16	1	0
16 to less than 26	1	0
26 to less than 40	2	1
40 to 65	3	2

*One portable B-II portable fire extinguisher may be substituted for two B-1 portable extinguishers

To determine the vessel construction date, you will need to check the vessel hull identification number (HIN) which is found on the vessel’s transom, vessel’s registration, and or documentation papers. Vessels constructed after 1972 will have a 12-character (i.e. ABC 67689 H6 06) HIN. Characters 9 and 10 (in this example “H6”) identify vessel manufacture’s date, with the 9th character indicating month starting with “A” for January. So, “H” would indicate August. The 10th character indicates the year manufactured and, in this case, could mean 1996, 2006 or 2016. So, the last two characters, which represent model year, will narrow the manufacture date down to 2016 in this case. VEs will now need to check the vessel manufacture date to determine which fire extinguisher guidelines apply. Federal regulations require all boat manufactures to place a “minimum number of 5-B portable fire extinguishers” on vessels built after August 22, 2016. These changes are stated in CFR Title 46 Part 25.30.20. CFR Title 46 Part 25.30.80 is for vessels built before August 22, 2016