



Tips for Passing Your Vessel Safety Check

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- **Registration/Documentation** – Always have your original registration or documentation papers handy.
- **Boat Registration Numbers** - Make sure your registration numbers are permanently attached to both sides of the forward half of the boat. The numbers should be in 3-inch, plain, block letters, and in a contrasting color from the hull. The state decals must be placed correctly in accordance with your state's boating registration regulations.
- **Lifejackets and Personal Flotation Devices** - Make sure that you have a personal flotation device (PFD or lifejacket) for every person on board, in a readily accessible location (and not still in its original plastic bags). Be sure the lifejackets are the correct size for each passenger. Boats 16-feet long or longer must also carry a throwable Type IV PFD as well. If you operate a personal watercraft, you *must* wear your lifejacket and many states require the PFD to be impact-rated. A 100 mile per hour (MPH) impact-rated PFD does not mean that you will be protected in a 100 MPH crash, but rather, the PFD will still float after a 100 MPH crash.
- **Visual Distress Signals** – Be certain Visual Distress Signals (VDS), such as flares, orange smoke, and other pyrotechnic devices, have not expired. Pyrotechnic devices typically have a 42-month shelf life. While some states do not require day and/or night VDS, it is recommended that all vessels carry both day (signal mirror, or orange flag) and night (strobe, flashlight, or lantern) signals. It is also a good idea to attach a strobe light and whistle to each PFD. Those small items and recommendations, while not required for pass a VSC, can be obtained from most marine dealers and marine catalog retailers.
- **Fire Extinguishers** – This is an important item. Be sure your fire extinguishers are fully charged, you have sufficient numbers of them for the type and size of your boat, and they are United States Coast Guard (USCG) approved ones. Mounting your fire extinguishers is also a great idea.
- **Ventilation Systems** - If you have a powerboat with an inboard or inboard/outboard engine, make sure your ventilation system works and, if built after August 1, 1978, displays a proper Certificate of Compliance.
- **Backfire Flame Arrestor Control Device** - Check to make sure your inboard or inboard/outboard (IO) gasoline engine has a functioning backfire flame arrestor control device. A non-working one can result in a very hazardous situation.

- **Sound producing devices** - Make certain sure your horn works, and if your boat requires it, have a bell. Once again, it is also a good idea to attach a whistle to each PFD onboard too. Learn the proper use of sound signals and rules of the road.
- **Navigation Lights** - Check your navigation lights regularly. Many times the bulbs blow, so it is a good idea to carry spare bulbs. Remember, all boats operating between sunset and sunrise and during periods of reduced visibility, must have navigation lights available for use and operating.
- **Oil Discharge Pollution and Marine Pollution (MARPOL) placards** – Boats, 26-feet in length and over, require both Oil Discharge Pollution and Marine Pollution (MARPOL) placards. Your Vessel Examiner may have those placards to give you. If not, you can also get them from area marinas and boat stores, which are often available at no charge.
- **Marine Sanitation Devices (MSD)** must be Coast Guard-approved and waste discharge outlets must be capable of being sealed. Check yours!
- **Navigation Rules** - Vessels over 39.4 feet are required to carry a copy of the Coast Guard Navigation Rules (COLREGs), but it is a good idea for all boats to carry them, as well as local navigation charts of the waters you boat on.
- **State Boating Regulations** - Make sure you obtain and read a copy of your state and local boating regulations so you can be certain your boat is in compliance. If you boat on waters outside your state of registration, you are required to comply with those state regulations.