

A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

I am sure you have heard by now that USPS® has joined the Coast Guard Auxiliary in performing vessel safety checks. If you own a boat (any kind) you should get one of our qualified "VSCers" to go over your boat and advise you of things which need to be corrected to get a decal or, if you pass, get the decal and display it. This should be done every year. Don't be afraid of "not passing", there is no penalty, they don't turn your name into the law enforcement people or even Martha Stewart, and you will be wiser for knowing what problems caused the failure.

In addition to the equipment required by law, the inspectors will touch on additional items and actually turn this into a learning experience and you will come away a better boater because of it. Some of the things they might bring out are listed below.

LIFE PRESERVERS (PFDs) Besides having an adequate number on board, the inspector may ask you what type of boating you do. If you only have one type of PFD on board (say a Type II Near-shore), they may advise you to get some Type I Off-shore jackets if you regularly boat off-shore. Or, if you water ski a lot, you may want a more comfortable Type III. Are they available (out of their store wrappers) and stowed where they can be quickly accessed and marked "life preservers inside"? Are they in good condition? Also, they will check for throwable devices.

SOUND PRODUCING DEVICES Your boat probably has an electric horn of some type, but do you have a backup of some kind that will work even though your batteries are dead? Also, if your vessel is over 39 feet long, you will have to have a bell on board (and a copy of the Navigation Rules).

FIRE EXTINGUISHERS In addition to checking for the required number, the VSC person will check that they are full, where they are placed (for instance, do you have one on the flying bridge and near the galley?). If they are in lockers, cupboards, etc. are they labeled "fire extinguisher inside"?

DISTRESS SIGNALS Besides checking the number and types, the inspector will check the expiration dates and determine if they are proper devices for your type of boating (inland versus international). Are they readily accessible? Do you have a signal mirror on board (an old circular CD with the hole in the center is an excellent signal mirror in view of its shiny reverse side)?

OTHER ITEMS The VSC will also check your state registration or Federal documentation and proper numbering, look for proper ventilation, fuel systems, clean bilges, neat wiring and piping, through-the-hull fittings, a clean backfire flame arrester (on gas inboard engines), de-watering devices (a bucket besides electric bilge pumps), appropriate anchor and anchor rode, paddles or oars on small boats, proper marine sanitation devices, pollution placards, trash disposal plan where required, inquire about proper charts for the area, and suggest additional equipment you may want to get for your type of boating.

As I said, it is a learning experience, not just a decal.

P/R/C Edward A. Bush, SN
Safety Committee