

# Be Smart. Go Out Prepared.

by Hank Foglino - Navigator

By now some of us are in the water and the rest will be afloat real soon. Have you made sure that the equipment by law is aboard? Yes indeed there are items mandated by the federal and state governments that you must have aboard. For the most part they are similar with few exceptions at which time the state takes precedence. The Coast Guard and local authorities can board your vessel to ascertain that you have met the requirements and impose a penalty if you have not. The following is a list of federal requirements. Check with your state's Boaters Guide for any deviations.

**Display of Registration Numbers** – Numbers must be permanently attached to each side of the forward half of the vessel. Validation stickers must be affixed within six inches after the registration numbers. Lettering must be plain vertical block characters of not less than three inches in height contrasting with the background. The registration number consists of the state designation, followed by four numbers and two letters. A space, or a hyphen the width of a letter (not I) must separate the first and last two letters from the middle numbers (NY 1234 AB). Documented vessels need not have registration numbers but must have the name of the vessel and hailing port plainly marked on the exterior of the vessel in letters not less than four inches in height.

Not complying with this regulation is plain dumb. The first thing a law enforcement officer sees when your vessel comes into view is your registration numbers. If displayed incorrectly it is a red flag inviting further investigation.

**Registration/Documentation** – You must have your original registration on board. It is waterproof so you need not fear of destroying it.

**Life Jackets** – used to be called personal flotation devices (PFD's) but I think we're going back to life savers which is a lot more descriptive. See applicable literature for the different available types and usage. They must be Coast Guard approved, in good condition, the appropriate size for the intended user and accessible. One for every person on the vessel.

**Remember accessible** - If your life savers are neatly wrapped in the package they came in, or they are jammed under a seat or into some other nook, they are not accessible.

New York State and Connecticut require one throwable life preserver for boats longer than 16-feet. These states also require children less than 12-years-old to wear an approved life preserver while underway unless the child is in an enclosed cabin.

**Visual Distress Signals** - Every mechanically propelled vessel, 16-feet and greater in length, carry at least three US Coast Guard Approved visual distress signals. These include night (flares, lights), day (flags, smoke) and those that fulfill night and day requirements (flares). They are dated and must not exceed three years. This is one of the most found violations. It can be easy to forget to check to see that your flares are less than three years old, but make every effort to do so. Also, if you are inspected in May and your flares expire in June, you may be legal you would be foolish not to immediately get a new set. June is



still the beginning of the boating season. Why wait another month when you might forget and wind up with a violation or worse yet, defective flares when you really need them. Another thing, do not use automobile flares. They are designed to be lit and lain on the road. If you hold them in your hand the burning material may drip onto it giving you a major burn. Marine flares are designed not to drip. However, I would attach them to a boat hook when in use. It gives you a higher display giving you more range and will prevent any hand burning if something goes awry.

**Fire Extinguishers** - Coast Guard approved fire extinguishers are required on boats where a fire hazard could be expected from motors or the fuel system. Type B, designed to extinguish flammable liquids, such as gasoline, oil and grease fires are required for shipboard use. The number indicates the relative size of the extinguisher, that larger the number the larger the extinguisher. Required is one B-1 for boats less than 26-feet, two B-1's or one B-2 for boats 26 to 40 feet and three B-1's or one B-1 and one B-2 for boats 40-to 65-feet. All extinguishers must be Coast Guard approved. It is highly recommended that the extinguishers be permanently mounted in an area where they will be quickly accessible. Not mounted they can "get lost" and hard to locate when you need them.

**Ventilation** - All boats which use gasoline for electrical generation, mechanical power or propulsion are required to be equipped with a ventilation system to vent areas where explosion fumes may accumulate and there is the possibility of ignition.

**Backfire Flame Control** - Internal combustion engines may back through the carburetor intake. To safeguard against fire. all inboard motorboats with carburetion must have a backfire flame arrestor system on each carburetor.

**Sound Producing Device/Bell** - Vessels less than 39.4-feet in length must have some means of making an efficient sound signal, i.e., handheld air horn, whistle, etc. Human voice sound not accepted. Vessels greater than 39.4-feet must carry a whistle or horn or some other means to make an efficient 4 second sound signal audible for 1/2 mile to signal your intentions and to signal your position in periods of reduced visibility. In addition must carry a bell (bell size not less than 7.9") with a clapper ball based on the diameter of the mouth.

**Navigation Lights** - All boats must be able to display navigation lights between sunset and sunrise or restricted visibility. Boats 16-feet or more must have operating installed navigation light and an all round anchor light capable of being lit independently from the red/green running lights. Review Federal publications for light configurations for your vessel.

**Pollution Placard** - Boats 26-feet or more with a machinery compartment must display an oily waste "pollution" placard.

**Marpol Trash Placard** - Boats 26-feet or more must display a "Marpol" trash placard. Boats over 40-feet must also display a written trash disposal plan.

**Marine Sanitation Device** - Any installed toilet must be a Coast Guard approved device. Overboard discharge outlets must be capable of being sealed.

**Navigation Rules** - Boats 39.4 feet and over must have on board a current copy of the Navigation Rules.

**Overall Boat Conditions** - Free from hazards, equipment stowed and secured. electrical circuits protected by fuses or circuit breakers Overall good conditions and safety.

The following items are not required by Federal law but it would certainly be a good idea to have them on board:

**Marine Radio** - Lets you communicate with land bases and/or other vessels. obviously a good thing to be able to do during an emergency. Cell phones are not recommended because of the many "blind spots" where they don't work.

**Anchor and anchor line for the area** - Be sure that your anchor is the one applicable to your vessel and have enough line to be able to anchor safely with sufficient rode.

**First aid kit** - Equipped to treat minor injuries, sun exposure headaches, stomach upsets etc.

Qualified members of the US Coast Guard Auxiliary and the United States Power Squadrons can inspect your vessel. If you meet the requirements you will be given a decal that you should display on your port windshield which will tell the Coast Guard and fellow boaters that you comply with the regulations. If at the time of the inspection, it is found that you don't meet one of the requirement, ex.: outdated flares, burned out navigation light, etc., the inspector will be glad to inspect your vessel when you have remedied the situation. When you pass you will be given the check sheet and decal indicating that you passed. There is no report written submitted or any other official processing. Neither the US Coast Guard Auxiliary or US Power Squadron are not involved with law enforcement and their only aim is to have you "go out prepared and be more assured assurance of coming back" See you afloat. ■