



## **How to PASS a Vessel Safety Check** **UNITED STATES POWER SQUADRONS®**

### **GETTING READY FOR A VSC**

#### **Vessel Owner/Operator should:**

1. Collect your State Registration papers, and (if documented) Coast Guard Documentation paper, Personal Flotation Devices (including a class IV throwable device), Visual Distress Signals (be sure these are not expired), and portable Fire Extinguishers, and place them where they can be conveniently examined-- usually in the cabin area. Also find your CO sticker sent to you by the State.
2. Locate your Hull Identification Number (HIN) which was put on by the manufacturer. It is usually found on the starboard stern somewhere.
3. If your vessel is Documented you must also locate the Official Number assigned by the Coast Guard, and it is "Permanently Marked on some interior STRUCTURAL part of the hull" by the owner. Be sure it is in the exact form: "No. XXXXXXX" (note the No and the dot !)
4. Clear an area around the engine box, and/or hatches, so the *Vessel Examiner (VE)* can visually examine the Bilge (for cleanliness and fire hazards), Battery/Box for proper tie-downs, and positive anode (+) cable covers if not in a box, Holding Tank for Y valve, Fuel Tank, Vents, and so on.
5. When the (VE) arrives, **TURN ON THE BATTERY**. Turn on your Running lights, but **NOT** the Anchor Light. The VE will verify that they are working properly prior to boarding.
6. At the VE's signal, turn OFF the Running Lights and turn ON the Anchor light. The VE will verify that it is working, although it is not a requirement. Turn OFF the Anchor light. The VE will then check state registration numbers and state decal or documented name and hailing port before coming aboard. Note that the vessel name and hailing port must be visible from the stern (don't let a stored dinghy cover it up).
7. Demonstrate that your ventilation blower (if equipped), and horn are working properly.
8. Present your documents and safety items for the VE to examine and stand by to answer questions.
9. Point out the location of the HIN, then (if documented) point out the location of the official Documented Vessel number.
10. Marine Sanitation Devices (The Head and Holding Tank) will be examined. If an overboard discharge is present, be sure to have the valve tied shut mechanically (plastic electrical wire tie is usually used), or not easily accidentally opened. If the vessel is a Bayliner with no overboard (wye) dump valve, it qualifies if it has 2 electrical dump valve switches which take 2 hands to activate simultaneously.
11. If appropriate (vessel 26' and over) you will need to show the VE your Pollution placard, MARPOL Placard, CO sticker, and if 40' or over, your written "Trash Disposal Plan" and copy of the "Navigation Rules".



## **Things that can go wrong – WILL!**

1. The most common cause for failing a VSC is failing to properly apply the vessel numbers and the validation decal. Also most common are running lights which don't work.

On un-documented vessels, the State Registration Numbers must be firmly attached (or painted) on both sides of the bow in block letters & numbers not less than three inches in height, and in a color distinctively contrasting with the background. The number must be read from left to right and include spaces or hyphens the width of the letters (other than I or 1) between the three parts of the registration number. The State registration decal must be placed on both sides of the bow, aft of and directly on line with the registration numbers and separated at least by the width of a letter (not 1 or I), and not to exceed six inches. Undocumented vessels must keep the STATE Registration papers onboard (the titles may be left at home).

Coast Guard Documented Vessels must have State registration decals affixed to the forward half of the vessel on each side of the bow. **DO NOT** display Washington State registration numbers on Documented Vessels. Coast Guard Vessel Documentation papers must be kept onboard, along with the State registration papers.

2. Next, if you have portable, dry chemical fire extinguishers, try to have them uncaked. It will be checked by tipping it to see if the contents flow easily from end to end. The pressure gage must also "be in the green". Being caked is cause for rejection, so try slapping it on its bottom with a plastic or rubber hammer for about 1 minute to loosen the contents. The heel of your hand may be used, but gets sore after a while. It is recommended that dry chemical fire extinguishers be replaced at least every 7 years.
3. Next would be Visual Distress Signals that are out of date. You need three day and if you boat at night, three night signals to pass. Aerial rocket flares qualify as BOTH Day & Night and are highly recommended. You can save the out-of-date ones for emergency backup, but stored separately from the "current" signals. VDS's must be readily available and properly sealed to protect from moisture.
4. PFD's must be readily available, in good shape, and the USCG approval statement must be legible. Class 4 throwable cushions or Life-rings must be immediately available, ready to toss. PFD's must NOT be in sealed bags. Inflatable PFDs are only counted when worn.
5. Last on the most-likely-list of failures: Navigation lights. Murphy's Law says that they will fail on the very day that the Vessel Examiner shows up. Carry spare bulbs and whatever tools are needed to facilitate their replacement.
6. As Vessel Examiners, we are here to help. Don't hesitate to e-mail, or call us.

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