

Get Your Free Vessel Safety Check!



photo: Art Michaels

You probably pay careful attention to boating safety and boat maintenance. Still, dangerous mechanical problems can crop up even on the best-maintained boat. That's why the U.S. Coast Guard recommends that all recreational boaters (including personal watercraft users) take advantage of the free Vessel Safety Check (VSC) program every year.

Vessel Safety Checks are provided by experienced U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and United States Power Squadrons members. They are by far your best way of learning about problems that might put you in violation of state or federal laws or worse, create danger for you or your passengers on the water.

All you have to do to get a Vessel Safety Check is to contact your local unit of the Coast Guard Auxiliary or United States Power Squadrons. A qualified volunteer vessel examiner will meet you at your boat at a prearranged time, any time during the year—or you can take advantage of a VSC event at a marina, boat access or dealership. A typical Vessel Safety Check takes only about 20 minutes.

The examiner will check the presence and condition of 15 items required by state and/or federal regulations. The examiner will also discuss items that are recommended but not required, and answer your questions on boating safety. At the conclusion of the VSC, you'll receive a copy of the official safety check form, and if your boat successfully meets all the requirements, your boat will have a VSC decal placed on it.

Remember—there's no charge for a VSC and vessel examiners do not issue fines or citations. If your boat

does not successfully pass the VSC for any reason, you can fix the problem at your own discretion and have an examiner verify that the item or items have been corrected. Then you'll receive your VSC decal.

Even though the VSC decal doesn't prevent boardings by law enforcement officers, it can give you confidence that such encounters are as beneficial as possible.

Vessel examiners have found potential life-threatening safety problems even on boats owned by safe, responsible boaters. Some of these problems include:

- Inoperable bilge pumps, creating the potential danger of sinking.
- Lack of proper backfire flame control devices, causing the potential danger of explosion.
- Inoperable fire extinguishers.
- Corroded fuel tanks and fuel lines.
- Automobile parts used on boat engines.
- Missing visual distress signals or inoperable navigation lights.
- Life jackets not properly sized for children and adults.

Carbon monoxide poisoning, one of today's most vital safety concerns, might also be part of the information exchange between you and the examiner.

Consider one more reason why you should get a Vessel Safety Check: Many insurers offer discounts to boaters who successfully pass a VSC.

To get your free Vessel Safety Check, contact your local unit of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary or United States Power Squadrons, or visit www.vesselsafetycheck.org to locate a vessel examiner near you.

For more information about boating safety, visit www.uscgboating.org, or call the Coast Guard Infoline at 1-800-368-5647. The Commission's web site, www.fish.state.pa.us, also includes a wealth of boating safety information. □

