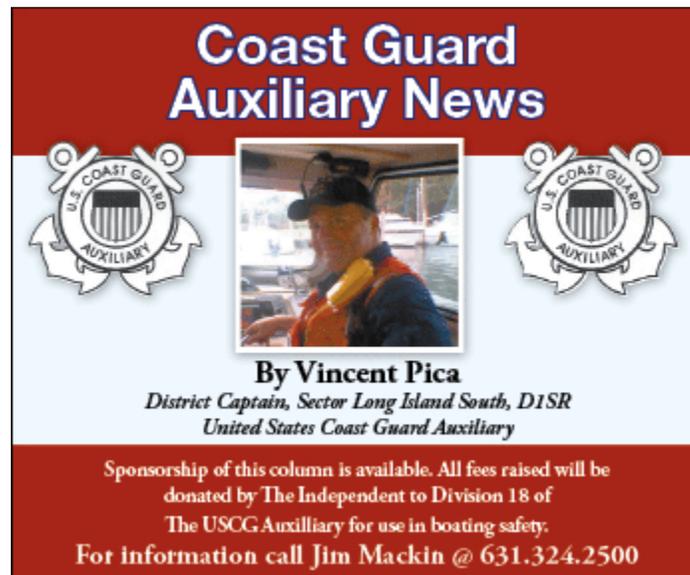


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INDEPENDENT

Coast Guard Aux NEWS ▶

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**Coast Guard
Auxiliary News**

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Sponsorship of this column is available. All fees raised will be
donated by The Independent to Division 18 of
The USCG Auxiliary for use in boating safety.
For information call Jim Mackin @ 631.324.2500

Vessel Safety Check "Mega-Weeks" May 22 through July 11 – and Free!

There is no greater "on the water" act of love for your fellow boaters, kids, spouses and friends than having a Vessel Safety Check conducted right in here. Oh, and it's your favorite price. Free. This column is about that.

Pedal to the Metal

The United States Coast Guard has declared to all its partners that, beginning with National Safe Boating Week, there is to be a concerted effort to get the word – and the deed – out there that all boaters and boats are entitled to, deserve and need a Vessel Safety Check (VSC). This event ends after the busy 4th of July weekend. During this seven week (eight weekends) time frame a focused and concentrated effort will be organized to perform VSCs at ramps, marinas, yacht clubs and other locations throughout our community.

Why Most Pass on the First Try and Why Some Need Two Tries

First, the VSC is NOT a regulatory event. If the boat doesn't meet USCG requirements for its size class, no one reports you to anybody. What is most likely to happen is one of two things:

1. Examiner: "Your flares are expired. Why don't you walk up to the boat house and buy yourself some current ones. I'll wait."

Boat Owner: "I'll be right back."

2. Examiner: "Here are the 3 things you need to address. Here's my cell phone #. Call me when you have them and I'll take a ride down to your marina."

Boat Owner: "Thanks so much."

There are a lot of reasons why a boat might not pass muster but that is the point of the exam. You don't want to find out, after you scream, "honey, put on a life-jacket!" that they are no longer serviceable enough to save your loved one(s.) And, as implied above, the most likely reason that the boat won't pass muster is because your flares have expired. I just had my inspection yesterday and I did pass – but now I realize that my flares will expire in 6 weeks. Time for new ones – now.

Here is a quick review of when and how many flares (Visual Distress Signals) are needed.

When:

1) At all times, boats 16 feet or more in length must carry VDS suitable for day use AND VDS suitable for night use OR VDS suitable for both day and night use.

2) Between sunset and sunrise, boats less than 16 feet in length must carry VDS suitable for night use.

3) The following vessels are not required to carry VDS suitable for day use, but must carry VDS suitable for night use when operating between sunset and sunrise:

a. boats participating in organized events such as regattas, races or marine parades

b. manually propelled boats

c. sailboats of completely open construction, less than 26 feet in length and not equipped with propulsion machinery.

How Many:

Only one approved orange flag need be carried to meet the requirements for a "day" signal. Only one approved electric distress light need be carried to meet the requirements for a "night" signal. The minimum required number for pyrotechnic VDS is three for day AND three for night, OR three that are suitable for day or night. Hand held and aerial flares are generally approved for day and night use, while orange smoke devices are only approved for day use. The boater can carry any number of expired devices, as well as any other type of distress signaling device, but if VDS are required, the boat must carry at least the minimum number of serviceable devices.

Next?

How about your fire extinguishers? That might trip you up and there are hardly any more frightening events at sea that a boat afire. No one will ever get to you in time (unless you are one lucky sailor to be on fire just as USCG Cutter comes up alongside!) and the fire is doubling in size every 5 minutes. So, let focus on fire extinguishers in here.

Fire Extinguishers: "To Tap or Not To Tap...that is the question."

The USCG Auxiliary recently put a report together in our "For Safety's Sake" e.magazine about fire extinguishers and the practice of shaking a fire extinguisher to "feel the powder moving inside or to tap the bottom to free up any caked material." I've done that a million times and never felt it myself. What I was always hoping for was NOT to feel the "thunk" of caked up retardant going back and forth in the cylinder. In reviewing this practice with the Coast Guard's Lifesaving and Fire Safety Division they indicated that there "is no official guidance requiring or recommending the shaking or inverting of an extinguisher to correct packed powder. It is not a practice recommended by NFPA or others. The issue of the powder packing was an issue on the first extinguishers. It has ceased to be an issue for users." (BTW, A good discussion of packing and caking of dry chemicals in fire extinguishers can be found in the technical bulletin issued by ANSUL available at: http://safetyseal.net/pdf_files/AnsulTechBul45.pdf.)

Old habits die hard. But remember this. Measure twice. Cut once.

BTW, if you are interested in being part of USCG Forces, email me at JoinUSCGAux2010@aol.com.