

# How To Pass A Vessel Inspection (VSC)

## Part 1

- 1) **Registration.** Make sure that the correct vessel registration is on board and is current. In addition to a valid date, the vessel's state registration numbers, and hull identification number must match the registration document exactly.

FOR DOCUMENTED VESSELS: Documentation numbers must be permanently marked on a visible part of the interior structure. The documented boat's name and hailing port must be displayed on the exterior hull in letters not less than 4 inches in height.

You would be surprised at the number of people that I've encountered who can't produce their boat registration or not even sure which document it is. Not producing the correct documentation has us off to a bad start and it's usually downhill from there. PLEASE have your correct documentation on board.

- 2) **Display of Numbers.** Numbers must be permanently attached to each side of the forward half of the vessel. The numbers must be read from left to right, and of a color that is contrasting with the background color; for example, black numbers on a white hull. Lettering must be in plain, vertical block characters of not less than 3 inches in height. Spaces or hyphens between letter and number groupings must be equal to the width of a letter other than "I" or a number other than "1". The validation stickers must be affixed within six inches of the registration numbers.

NOTE: The letters/numbers should be a plain block font like "Ariel" not cursive, swirly or otherwise. The letters/numbers should not be multiple colors, fancy fadings, shadows or outlines. **Caution:** Even though there are local stores willing to sell you these types of lettering does not make it legal to display on your vessel.

- 3) **Personal Flotation Devices.** The USCG requires that there be a USCG approved PFD (in good condition) on board for each passenger. Vessels 16' - 65' must also carry a Type IV throwable device such as a cushion or ring buoy. Children must have a PFD suitable for their size. In the state of Ohio, children under the age of 10 must be wearing their PFD while on board vessels 18' or less.
- 4) **Visual Distress Signals.** Here are the basics. For vessels less than 16' distress signals are only required when operating between sunset and sunrise. 3 combination day/night red flares or 1 electric distress light are required. For vessels 16' or longer you are required to have 3 handheld or floating orange smoke signals and 3 night flares or 3 combination day/night flares, hand-held, meteor or parachute type or 1 orange distress flag and 1 electric distress light or 3 handheld or floating orange smoke signals and one electric distress light or flare gun with 3 day/night cartridges. NOTE: Make sure that your flares are not expired. There are other combinations possible.
- 5) **Fire Extinguishers.** Fire extinguishers are required if one of the following conditions exists: (1) Inboard engine(s); (2) Closed compartments that store portable fuel tanks; (3) Double bottom hulls not completely sealed or not completely filled with flotation materials (4) Closed living space (5) Closed stowage compartments that contain flammable materials or (6) Permanently installed fuel tanks.

Power vessels <26' or are required to have 1 B-I fire extinguisher. Power vessels 26' to <40 are required to have 2 B-1 or 1 B-2 extinguishers. Power vessels 40' to 65' are required to have 3 B-1 or 1 B-1 and 1 B-2 extinguishers. The fire extinguisher gauge should be in the green and the unit should not be more than 10 years old. A 2 digit date is often stamped on the bottom of the extinguisher. A fixed system such as "Halon" replaces 1 B-1 extinguisher. Make sure that your fixed system's maintenance requirements are current and that the proper maintenance certificate is properly affixed.

- 6) **Ventilation.** Boats with gasoline engines in closed compartments, built after 1 August 1980 must have a powered ventilation system. Those built prior to that date must have natural or powered ventilation. The ventilation system is designed to remove potentially dangerous fumes. Usually to the aft starboard and port are the intake and exhaust vents. Turn on your exhaust and place your hand over the exhaust port and make sure that it is blowing air out. **ADDITIONALLY:** Boats with closed fuel tank compartments built after 1 August 1978 must meet requirements by displaying a "certificate of compliance." Boats built before that date must have either natural or powered ventilation in the fuel tank compartment. Outboard equipped vessels are exempt.
- 7) **Backfire Flame Control.** Called a Flame Arrestor needs to be clean and oil free. HINT: The arrestor is situated on top of the carburetor and held in place by a single nut. Outboard and Diesel engines are exempt.
- 8) **Sound Producing Device.** This one is simple. All vessels to 65' are required to have a sounding device such as an installed boat horn, whistle or air horn, etc. capable of a 4-second blast audible for ½ mile. Vessels 65' feet or more in length are required to carry a whistle or horn and a bell that are audible for 1 mile.
- 9) **Navigation Lights.** All boats must be able to display navigation lights between sunset and sunrise and in conditions of reduced visibility. Boats 16 feet or more in length must have properly installed, working navigation lights and an all-around anchor light capable of being lit independently from the red/green/white "running" lights.

## PART 2

- 1) **Pollution Placard.** Lake Erie as well as all Great Lakes are federally controlled waters and boaters are subject to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act.. If your vessel is 26' and over, you are required to have a Discharge of Oil Placard affixed in a conspicuous place in the machinery or bilge pump area of your vessel. The discharge of oil or oily waste into any navigable waters of the U.S. are strictly prohibited by law.
- 2) **Marpol Trash Placard.** Let's make this one simple! Don't throw any waste overboard okay! Vessels 26' or greater are required to have a Trash Placard on display. Usual places to affix the placard are in the galley or head, etc. Vessels 40' and over must additionally have a written trash disposal plan onboard.
- 3) **Marine Sanitation Devices.** On Lake Erie you are prohibited from discharging waste into the water. If your vessel has a porta potty you are okay in that you will remove the unit for

emptying once ashore or at a pump out station. If you have a flush toilet that empties into a holding tank that is a closed system and can not be discharged overboard you are okay as well. Here's where it gets a little tricky. If your vessel's head has or has had the capability of discharging waste overboard, that feature must be disabled. This is too complicated to fully discuss in this article. I would strongly advise that you contact the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary and have a vessel examiner do an inspection to assure that you are in compliance with federal law.

- 4) **Navigation Rules.** Boats 39.4' and over must have a current copy of the navigation rules on board.
- 5) **State Requirements.** Pick up a copy of "Ohio Boat Operators Guide." Contact the USCG Auxiliary or the Department of Natural Resources (ODNR).
- 6) **Overall Vessel Condition.** Your vessel must be free from fire hazards, in good overall condition, with bilges reasonably clean and visible hull structure generally sound. The engine horsepower must not exceed that shown on the capacity plate. The electrical system must be protected by fuses or manual reset circuit breakers. Switches and fuse panels must be protected from rain or water spray. Wiring must be in good condition, properly installed and with no exposed areas or deteriorated insulation. Batteries must be secured and terminals covered to prevent accidental arcing. If installed, self-circling or kill switch mechanisms must be in proper working order. Portable fuel tanks (normally 7 gallon capacity or less) must be constructed of non-breakable material and free of corrosion and leaks. All vents must be capable of being closed. The tank must be secured and have a vapor-tight, leak-proof cap. Each permanent fuel tank must be properly ventilated. System and fuel tanks must be properly secured with no flammable materials nearby.

### PART 3

Several of the following items are optional but your compliance is strongly recommended.

- 1) **Marine Radio:** If you have one on board, you are required to have it on at all times while underway. Some radios will automatically monitor channels 9 and 16. Become familiar with its operation. The emergency channel is 16
- 2) **Dewatering Device:** Keep a device on board such as a manual bilge pump or bucket for bailing in the event that your vessel should begin to take on water.
- 3) **Mount All Fire Extinguishers:** This allows for easy access when needed.
- 4) **Anchor and Line:** Maintain 100' of line for your anchor. Regularly inspect its condition.
- 5) **First Aid Kit:** Keep one on board.
- 6) **Ohio Accident Reporting Procedures:** You are responsible for reporting any accidents that you are involved in to the U.S. Coast Guard or the Ohio Department of Natural Resources as follows:

- Loss of life or disappearance from a vessel; OR
- An injury that requires treatment beyond first aid; OR
- Combined damage in excess of \$500; OR
- Complete loss of vessel.

Reports must be submitted within 48 hours for injuries or death. For other cases reports must be submitted within 10 days. There are additional Federal reporting requirements. BEST ADVICE is to take a Coast Guard Auxiliary safe boating class. It is the responsibility of the boater to fully understand all laws governing the operation a their vessel while boating on state and federal waters!

- 7) **Nautical Charts:** Keep them on board and know how to read them. We have spoken on the importance of this several times in pass articles.
- 8) **Float Plan:** We have spoken on this in the past as well. A float plan simply informs someone onshore where you are boating, who is on board, when you are expected back and a description of your vessel including registration (OH) numbers. This information can be given to authorities should you go missing.