



Florida Vessel Safety Inspection

Courtesy of Boat Owners Association of The United States

Beginning July 1, 2016, boats that are boarded by Florida state and local marine law enforcement and successfully complete a safety inspection will be issued an inspection decal. Once the new decal is properly displayed, state and local officers may not stop that watercraft again solely for the purpose of a vessel safety inspection.

Vessels with the decal may, however, be stopped by marine law enforcement officers for any other lawful reason. Additionally, having the decal does not change the authority for the U.S. Coast Guard to board a vessel.



What does the decal demonstrate?

The new law provides that a vessel operator shall demonstrate compliance with safety equipment carriage and use requirements during a safety inspection initiated by a law enforcement officer. Upon compliance of the above safety inspection, a safety inspection decal will be issued.

FL Statute 327.70(2)(a): “Upon demonstrated compliance with the safety equipment carriage and use requirements of this chapter during a safety inspection initiated by a law enforcement officer, the operator of a vessel shall be issued a safety inspection decal signifying that the vessel is deemed to have met the safety equipment carriage and use requirements of this chapter at the time and location of such inspection.”

The “Courtesy Marine Examination” stickers issued by the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and U.S. Power Squadrons do not exempt boats from any safety boarding.

Where do I place my decal?

The safety inspection decal must be located within 6 inches of the inspected vessel’s properly displayed vessel registration decal. This signifies that the vessel has met the safety equipment requirements at the time and location of the inspection. Thereafter, when a vessel properly displays a valid safety inspection decal, law enforcement officers may not stop a vessel solely to inspect safety equipment. However, a law enforcement officer may stop a vessel for reasonable suspicion of any vessel violation, even with a valid safety inspection decal.

FL Statute 327.70(2)(a): “The safety inspection, if displayed, must be located within 6 inches of the inspected vessel’s properly displayed vessel registration decal. For nonmotorized vessels that are not required to be registered, the safety inspection decal, if displayed, must be located above the waterline on the forward half of the port side of the vessel.”

How Will the Decals Be Issued?

The decals will only be issued to vessels on the water after an inspection that is initiated by a law enforcement officer. Boat-ers may request a safety inspection from an officer while on the water. However, there is no guarantee that officer will be able to inspect the vessel and issue a decal. You should request the decal if you receive an on the water safety inspection. Currently these decals have no expiration date.

What authority is granted to the Coast Guard?

The United States Coast Guard (USCG), under statute 14 U.S.C. § 89, has the authority to stop and board a vessel on the open sea.

14 U.S.C. § 89(a) authorizes the Coast Guard to: “make inquiries, examinations, inspections, searches, seizures, and arrests upon the high seas and waters over which the United States has jurisdiction, for the prevention, detection, and suppression or violations of laws of the United States.”

During this stop they may search every compartment of the vessel.

What safety equipment is required?

	Under 16ft	16ft-Under 26ft	26th-Under 40ft	40ft-Under 65ft
Life Jacket	<i>Must carry USCG approved Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs). There must be 1 Type I, II, III, or V PFD for each person on board, PLUS one type IV throwable device.</i>	<i>Must carry USCG approved PFDs. There must be 1 Type I, II, III, or V PFD for each person on board, PLUS one type IV throwable device.</i>	<i>Must carry USCG approved PFDs. There must be 1 Type I, II, III, or V PFD for each person on board, PLUS one type IV throwable device.</i>	<i>Must carry USCG approved PFDs. There must be 1 Type I, II, III, or V PFD for each person on board, PLUS one type IV throwable device.</i>
Fire Extinguishers	<i>At least one B-1 type USCG approved hand portable fire extinguisher</i>	<i>At least one B-1 type USCG approved hand portable fire extinguisher</i>	<i>At least two B-1 type approved portable fire extinguishers; OR at least one B-2 type</i>	<i>At least three B-1 type approved portable fire extinguishers; OR at least one B-1 type PLUS one B-2 type</i>
Visual Distress Signalss	<i>Must carry for nighttime use</i>	<i>Must carry for daytime & nighttime use; 3 for daytime & 3 for night use</i>	<i>Must carry for daytime & nighttime use; 3 day/night devices will suffice</i>	<i>Must carry for daytime & nighttime use; 3 day/night devices will suffice</i>
Sound Producing Device	<i>Must carry (i.e., whistle or horn)</i>	<i>Must carry</i>	<i>Must carry sound producing device capable of a 4-second blast audible for 1/2 mile</i>	<i>Must carry sound producing device capable of a 4-second blast audible for 1/2 mile</i>
Ventilation (boats built before 8/80)	<i>At least 2 ventilator ducts fitted with cowls or equivalent</i>	<i>At least 2 ventilator ducts fitted with cowls or equivalent</i>	<i>At least 2 ventilator ducts fitted with cowls or equivalent</i>	<i>At least 2 ventilator ducts fitted with cowls or equivalent</i>
Ventilation (boats built after 8/80)	<i>At least 2 ventilator ducts</i>	<i>At least 2 ventilator ducts</i>	<i>At least 2 ventilator ducts</i>	<i>At least 2 ventilator ducts</i>
Backfire Flame Arrestor	<i>1 approved device on each carburetor of all gas engines installed after 4/25/40, except outboard motors</i>	<i>1 approved device on each carburetor of all gas engines installed after 4/25/40, except outboard motors</i>	<i>1 approved device on each carburetor of all gas engines installed after 4/25/40, except outboard motors</i>	<i>1 approved device on each carburetor of all gas engines installed after 4/25/40, except outboard motors</i>

Note: The USCG's free pamphlet, "Federal Requirements for Recreational Boats," gives more complete details on how many and what types of equipment you must have aboard your boat. Call the Coast guard, 800-368-5647 or visit their website at www.uscgboating.org to obtain a copy.

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