

## Federal Requirements and Safety Tips for Recreational Boats

### U.S. Coast Guard Minimum Safety Requirements

#### Class A (Boats less than 16 feet)

##### Flotation Devices

**One Type I,II,III or V PFD for each person on the boat or being towed.**

##### Fire Extinguishers

**At least one B-I type. Fire extinguishers are required on boats with enclosed engine compartments, enclosed living spaces, or permanent fuel tanks.**

##### Visual Distress Signals

**All vessels used on coastal waters, the Great Lakes, territorial seas, and those waters connected directly to them up to the point where a body of water is less than two miles wide, must be equipped with visual distress signals. The following vessels are not required to carry day signals, but must carry night signals when operating from sunset to sunrise:**

- **Recreational boats less than 16 feet in length**
- **Boats participating in organized events such as races, regattas, or marine parades**
- **Open sailboats less than 26 feet in length not equipped with propulsion machinery**
- **Manually propelled boats**
- **Flares are considered unacceptable 48 months after the date of manufacture**

##### Sound Producing Devices

**Horn, whistle, or any device capable of making an efficient sound signal.**

##### Backfire Flame Control

**Vessels having a gasoline engine are required to have a device called a Back Fire Flame Arrester, a mechanical arrangement which prevents the engine from back firing and/or possibly exploding.**

**Every gasoline engine installed after April 25, 1940, excluding outboard motors, must be equipped with an acceptable means of backfire flame control. Sailboats with an engine are considered a motorboat.**

##### Ventilation

**The boat operator is responsible for keeping the ventilation systems in operating condition, making sure openings are free of obstructions, ducts are not blocked or torn, blowers are operating properly and worn out components are replaced with equivalent equipment.**

**In addition, a device known as an exhaust blower is required for use with gasoline engines. Since gas vapors are both volatile and heavier than air, they can accumulate to dangerous levels in the bilge of an unventilated boat. The exhaust blower is turned on five minutes before starting the engine to evacuate any residual vapors outside the boat. Diesel engines don't require a blower, since diesel fuel ignites at a higher temperature and is therefore less likely to explode or catch fire from a spark.**

## Navigation Lights

**Many states require all sailboats to carry sidelights and a sternlight, but small sailboats (under 23 feet) are not required to do so under the Inland Rules of Navigation. If a small sailboat does not have navigation lights, the Rules require a flashlight or other white flare-up light to be exhibited in sufficient time to avoid a collision.**

## Class 1 (Boats from 16 to 26 feet)

### Flotation Devices

**One Type I,II,III or V PFD are required for each person on the boat or being towed, plus one Type IV throwable device.**

### Fire Extinguishers

**At least one B-I type hand portable.**

### Visual Distress Signals

**All vessels used on coastal waters, the Great Lakes, territorial seas, and those waters connected directly to them up to the point where a body of water is less than two miles wide, must be equipped with visual distress signals. The following vessels are not required to carry day signals, but must carry night signals when operating from sunset to sunrise:**

- **Boats participating in organized events such as races, regattas, or marine parades**
- **Open sailboats less than 26 feet in length not equipped with propulsion machinery**
- **In Canada vessels over 18 feet must carry Canadian Coast Guard approved flares. US Coast Guard flares are unacceptable**
- **Flares are considered effective 48 months from the date of manufacture**

### Sound Producing Devices

**Horn, whistle, or any device capable of making an efficient sound signal.**

### Backfire Flame Control

**Vessels having a gasoline engine are required to have a device called a Back Fire Flame Arrester, a mechanical arrangement which prevents the engine from back firing and/or possibly exploding.**

**Every gasoline engine installed after April 25, 1940, excluding outboard motors, must be equipped with an acceptable means of backfire flame control. Sailboats with an engine are considered a motorboat. Arresters must be USCG approved.**

### Ventilation

**There should be at least two ducts for the purpose of ventilating every closed compartment that contains a gasoline engine and tank, except those having permanently installed tanks which vent outside the boat and contain no unprotected electrical devices. Also, engine compartments containing a gasoline engine having a**

**cranking motor must contain power operated exhaust blowers which can be controlled from the instrument panel.**

**The boat operator is responsible for keeping the ventilation systems in operating condition, making sure openings are free of obstructions, ducts are not blocked or torn, blowers are operating properly, and worn out components are replaced with equivalent equipment.**

#### Navigation Lights

**All sailboats must carry port and starboard sidelights as well as a stern light. A sailboat under sail should not display a masthead light, as this light is shown only by powered machinery. A tricolor masthead light may be used, as may a red over green light at the mast head to denote a sailing vessel, although the two cannot be used simultaneously. When a sailboat is motoring, it is required to exhibit a steaming light.**

#### Class 2 (Boats from 26 to 40 feet)

##### Flotation Devices

**One type I,II, or III, and Type IV throwable devices are required for each person on board or being towed.**

##### Fire Extinguishers

**At least one B-II class approved hand-portable fire extinguisher or at least two B-I class approved hand-portable fire extinguishers are required. If the vessel has a fixed fire extinguishing system, there must be at least one B-I class approved hand-portable fire extinguisher.**

##### Visual Distress Signals

**All vessels used on coastal waters, the Great Lakes, territorial seas and those water connected directly to them up to the point where a body of water is less than two miles wide, must be equipped with visual distress signals. The following vessels are not required to carry day signals, but must carry night signals when operating from sunset to sunrise..**

- **Boats participating in organized events such as races, regattas, or marine parades**
- **Manually propelled boats**

**Most boats, and all boats operating in open waters, must be equipped with visual distress signals classified by the US Coast Guard as day or night use only, or a combination day/night use. Each device must be in serviceable condition, readily accessible, and certified by the manufacturer as complying with Coast Guard requirements. Distress flares, smoke flares, and meteor rockets have expiration dates of 42 months after the date of manufacture.**

**In Canada vessels of 18 feet must carry Canadian Coast Guard approved flares according to the length of the vessel, and US Coast Guard flares are not acceptable. These flares are considered effective for 48 months after the date of manufacture.**

##### Sound Producing Devices

**Horn, whistle, or any device capable of making an efficient sound signal.**

## Backfire Flame Control

**Vessels having a gasoline engine are required to have a device called a Back Fire Flame Arrester, a mechanical arrangement which prevents the engine from back firing and/or possibly exploding.**

**Every gasoline engine installed after April 25, 1940, excluding outboard motors, must be equipped with an acceptable means of backfire flame control. Sailboats with an engine are considered a motorboat. Arresters must be USCG approved**

## Ventilation

**At least two ducts for the purpose of ventilating every closed compartment that contains a gasoline engine and tank, except those having permanently installed tanks which vent outside the boat and contain no unprotected electrical devices. Also, engine compartments containing a gasoline engine having a cranking motor must contain power operated exhaust blowers which can be controlled from the instrument panel.**

**The boat operator is responsible for keeping the ventilation systems in operating condition, making sure openings are free of obstructions, ducts are not blocked or torn, blowers are operating properly and worn out components are replaced with equivalent equipment.**

## Navigation Lights

**All sailboats must carry port and starboard side lights as well as a stern light. A sailboat under sail should not display a masthead light as this light is shown only by powered machinery. A tricolor masthead light may be used, as may a red over green light at the mast head to denote a sailing vessel, although the two cannot be used simultaneously. When a sailboat is motoring, it is required to exhibit a steaming light.**

## Class 3 ( Boats from 39.4 to 65.6 feet)

### Flotation Devices

**One Type I,II,III or V PFD are required for each person on the boat or being towed, plus one Type IV throwable device.**

### Fire Extinguishers

**At least three B-I class approved hand-portable fire extinguishers, or at least one B-I class plus one B-II class approved hand-portable fire extinguisher are needed onboard. If the vessel has a fixed fire extinguishing system, there must be at least two B-I class or at least one B-II approved unit.**

### Visual Distress Signals

**All vessels used on coastal waters, the Great Lakes, territorial seas, and those water connected directly to them up to the point where a body of water is less than two miles wide, must be equipped with visual distress signals. The following vessels are not required to carry day signals, but must carry night signals when operating from sunset to sunrise.**

- **Boats participating in organized events such as races, regattas, or marine parades**

- **Manually propelled boats**

**Most boats, and all boats operating in open waters, must be equipped with visual distress signals classified by the US Coast Guard as day or night use only, or a combination day/night use. Each device must be in serviceable condition, readily accessible, and certified by the manufacturer as complying with Coast Guard requirements. Distress flares, smoke flares, and meteor rockets have expiration dates of 42 months after the date of manufacture.**

#### Sound Producing Devices

**These boats must carry a whistle and bell. The whistle must be audible for 1/2 nautical mile and the mouth of the bell must be at least 200mm in diameter.**

#### Backfire Flame Control

**Vessels having a gasoline engine are required to have a device called a Back Fire Flame Arrester, a mechanical arrangement that prevents the engine from back firing and/or possibly exploding. Every gasoline engine installed after April 25, 1940, excluding outboard motors, must be equipped with an acceptable means of backfire flame control. Sailboats with an engine are considered a motorboat. Arresters must be USCG approved.**

#### Ventilation

**At least two ducts for the purpose of ventilating every closed compartment that contains a gasoline engine and tank, except those having permanently installed tanks which vent outside the boat and contain no unprotected electrical devices. Also, engine compartments containing a gasoline engine having a cranking motor must contain power operated exhaust blowers that can be controlled from the instrument panel.**

#### Navigation Lights

**All sailboats must carry port and starboard sidelights as well as a stern light. A sailboat under sail should not display a masthead light as this light is shown only by powered machinery. A tricolor masthead light may be used, as may a red over green light at the masthead to denote a sailing vessel, although the two cannot be used simultaneously. When a sailboat is motoring, it is required to exhibit a steaming light.**