

Leisure Vessel Regulations

Introduction

Pleasure craft can be considered to be vessels that are used for sport or recreational purposes only and do not operate for any financial gain to the owner. A more extensive legal definition can be had by reference to the Merchant Shipping (Vessels in Commercial Use for Sport or Pleasure) 1998 as amended.

This document gives advice and some detail on what regulations apply. More specific information can be obtained by consulting the relevant regulations or by contacting the MCA

Note: If more than 12 passengers are carried, irrespective of whether payment is made, the vessel is a “passenger ship” under the Merchant Shipping Regulations. A passenger may be considered as anyone onboard not involved with the running of the vessel. If it is intended to carry more than 12 passengers, notification should be made to the Agency’s local Marine Office. On a case by case basis, the local Marine Office may consider the granting of an exemption from the applicable Passenger Ship Regulations for a pleasure vessel carrying more than 12 passengers, on an occasional basis.

Safety Equipment

Pleasure craft of less than 13.7 metres in length are not covered by any statutory requirements as far as life saving or fire fighting equipment is concerned.

At 13.7 metres in length and over they are, however, obliged to comply with the Merchant Shipping (Life-Saving Appliances for ships other than ships of Classes III to VI (A)) Regulations 1999 and the Merchant Shipping (Fire Protection: Small Ships) Regulations 1998 respectively. These vessels are classified as being Class XII in these Regulations.

SOLAS V For Pleasure Craft

On 1 July 2002, some new regulations came into force, which directly affect pleasure craft users. These regulations are part of Chapter V of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, otherwise known as SOLAS V. Most of the SOLAS convention only applies to large commercial ships, but parts of Chapter V apply to small, privately owned pleasure craft. The following requirements apply to all craft, irrespective of size. If you are involved in a boating accident and it is subsequently shown that you have not applied the basic principles outlined in this document, you could be prosecuted.

Voyage Planning

Regulation V/34 ‘Safe Navigation and avoidance of dangerous situations’, is a new regulation. It concerns prior-planning for your boating trip, more commonly known as voyage or passage planning. Voyage planning is basically common sense. As a pleasure boat user, you should particularly take into account the following points when planning a boating trip:

- **Weather:** before you go boating, check the weather forecast and get regular updates if you are planning to be out for any length of time.
- **Tides:** check the tidal predictions for your trip and ensure that they fit with what you are planning to do.
- **Limitations of the vessel:** consider whether your boat is up to the proposed trip and that you have sufficient safety equipment and stores with you.
- **Crew:** take into account the experience and physical ability of your crew. Crews suffering from cold, tiredness and seasickness won’t be able to do their job properly and could even result in an overburdened skipper.

- **Navigational dangers:** make sure you are familiar with any navigational dangers you may encounter during your boating trip. This generally means checking an up to date chart and a current pilot book or almanac.
- **Contingency plan:** always have a contingency plan should anything go wrong. Before you go, consider bolt holes and places where you can take refuge should conditions deteriorate or if you suffer an incident or injury. Bear in mind that your GPS set is vulnerable and could fail at the most inconvenient time. It is sensible and good practice to make sure you are not over-reliant on your GPS set and that you can navigate yourself to safety without it should it fail you.
- **Information ashore:** make sure that someone ashore knows your plans and knows what to do should they become concerned for your well being. The Coastguard Voluntary Safety Identification Scheme (commonly known as CG66) is also free and easy to join. The scheme aims to help the Coastguard to help you quickly should you get into trouble while boating. It could save your life.

Radar Reflectors

Large ships rely on radar for navigation and for spotting other vessels in their vicinity. So, whatever size your boat is, it's important to make sure that you can be seen by radar. Regulation V/19 requires all small craft to fit a radar reflector 'if practicable'. If your boat is more than 15m in length, you should be able to fit a radar reflector that meets the IMO requirements of 10m². If your boat is less than 15m in length, you should fit the largest radar reflector you can. Whatever size your boat is, the radar reflector should be fitted according to the manufacturer's instructions, and as high as possible to maximise its effectiveness.

Life Saving Signals

Regulation V/29 requires you to have access to an illustrated table of the recognised life saving signals, so that you can communicate with the search and rescue services or other boats if you get into trouble. You can get a free copy of this table in a leaflet produced by the MCA, available at www.mcga.gov.uk, or you can also find it in various nautical publications. If your boat is not suitable for carrying a copy of the table on board (because it's small or very exposed), make sure you've studied the table before you go boating. Larger boats should keep a copy on board.

Assistance to Other Craft

Regulations V/31, V/32 and V/33 require you:

to let the Coastguard and any other vessels in the vicinity know if you encounter anything that could cause a serious hazard to navigation, if it has not already been reported. You can do this by calling the Coastguard on VHF, if you have it on board, or by telephoning them at the earliest opportunity. The Coastguard will then warn other vessels in the area.

to respond to any distress signal that you see or hear and help anyone or any boat in distress as best you can.

Misuse of Distress Signals

Regulation V/35 prohibits misuse of any distress signals. These are critical to safety at sea and by misusing them you could put your or someone else's life at risk.

Navigation

With respect to navigation and collision avoidance any vessel that proceeds to sea, irrespective of size, is required to comply with the Merchant Shipping (Distress Signals & Prevention of Collisions) Regulations 1996. It is of paramount importance that all vessels at sea comply with the International Regulations for the Prevention of Collisions at Sea. These are contained within the Merchant Shipping regulations that also set out the penalties for

non-compliance, which could be a fine of up to **£50,000** in serious cases. Vessels over 13.7m in length must report accidents to the Marine Accident Investigation Branch. Vessels under 13.7m are not required to report accidents, but good practice would dictate that serious incidents are reported.

The Regulations require that all vessels that proceed to sea are correctly provided with, and exhibit, navigation lights, shapes and sound signalling devices consistent with the vessel's length, type and circumstances. Navigation lights are required if the vessel is likely to operate at night or in poor visibility by day.

Owners should ensure that the lights they provide on their vessels are of approved types, also that they are displayed in their correct position(s) on the vessel.

Pollution

The requirements of the international pollution prevention regulations (MARPOL) apply to all vessels but for pleasure vessels no survey is required. The Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Pollution by Garbage) Regulations 1998 set out what garbage can be thrown over the side and where, under MARPOL Annex V regulations. Further information is given in [MSN 1720](#). Under a new EU Directive, all vessels will have to put waste in a waste reception facility before leaving a port.