

**How to survive a FREE Vessel Safety Check.**  
**UNITED STATES POWER SQUADRONS**

**GETTING READY FOR A VSC**

**Vessel Owner/Operator will:**

1. Collect your State Registration papers, and (if documented) Coast Guard Documentation papers, Personal Flotation Devices (including a class IV throwable device), Visual Distress Signals, and portable dry-chemical Fire Extinguishers, and place them where they can be conveniently examined-- usually in the cabin area.
2. In advance-- locate your Hull Identification Number (HIN) which was put on by the manufacturer. If your vessel is Documented you must also locate the Official Number assigned by the Coast Guard, it is "Permanently Marked on some interior STRUCTURAL part of the hull" by the owner.
3. Clear an area around the motor box, and/or hatches, so the *Vessel Examiner* (VE) can visually examine the Bilge, Battery Box, Holding Tank, Fuel Tank, Vents, and so on.
4. When the (VE) arrives, **TURN ON THE BATTERY**. Turn ON your Running lights, but NOT the Anchor Light. The VE will verify that they are working properly.
5. At the VE's signal, turn OFF the Running Lights and turn ON the Anchor light. The VE will verify that it is working. Turn OFF the Anchor light. The VE will then check registration numbers or documented name before coming aboard.
6. Demonstrate that your bilge pump, ventilation blower, horn, radio, and other electric/electronic devices are working properly. **TURN OFF YOUR BATTERY** unless you need it for other purposes.
7. Present your documents and safety items for the VE to examine and stand by to answer questions.
8. Point out the location of the HIN, then (if documented) point out the location of the official Documented number.
9. Marine Sanitation Devices (The Head and Holding Tank) will be examined.
10. If appropriate (vessel 26' and over) you will need to show the VE your Pollution placard and MARPOL Placard, and if 40' or over, your written "Trash Disposal Plan" and copy of the "Navigation Rules".

## **Things that can go wrong – WILL!**

- 1. The most common cause for failing a VSC is failing to properly apply the vessel numbers and the validation decal.**  
On **un-documented** vessels, the State Registration Numbers must be firmly attached (or painted) on both sides of the bow in **block** letters & numbers not less than **three** inches in height, and in a color distinctively **contrasting** with the background. The number must be read from left to right and include **spaces** or hyphens the width of the letters (other than I or 1) **between** the three parts of the registration number. The State registration decal must be placed on both sides of the bow, aft of and directly on line with the registration numbers and separated by the width of the letters, but not to exceed **six** inches.  
Coast Guard **Documented** Vessels will affix State registration **decals** to the forward half of the vessel on each side of the bow. **DO NOT** display Washington State registration **numbers** on Documented Vessels.  
Coast Guard Vessel Documentation papers must be kept onboard, along with the State registration papers.  
Undocumented vessels must keep the STATE Registration papers onboard and the titles at home.
- 2. Next is having your portable, dry chemical, fire extinguisher caked. It is checked by tipping it to see if the contents flow easily from end to end. The pressure gage must also "be in the green". Being caked is cause for rejection, so try slapping it around to loosen the contents.**
- 3. Next would be Visual Distress Signals that are out of date. You need three day and three night signals to pass. Aerial rocket flares qualify as BOTH Day & Night and are highly recommended. You can save the out-of-date ones for emergency backup. VDS's must be readily available and properly sealed to protect from moisture.**
- 4. PFD's must be readily available, in good shape, and the USCG approval statement must be legible. Class 4 throwable cushions or Liferings must be immediately available, ready to toss. PFD's must NOT be in sealed bags.**
- 5. Last on the most-likely-list of failures: Navigation and Anchor lights. Murphy's Law says that they will fail on the very day that the Vessel Examiner shows up. Carry spares and whatever tools are needed to facilitate their replacement.**
- 6. As a Vessel Examiner I am here to help. Don't hesitate to e-mail me, or call.**

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