

## **PROGRAM GUIDANCE FOR DISPLAY OF VESSEL REGISTRATION NUMBERS**

Several questions and issues have been raised concerning the proper display of state issued registration numbers on recreational vessels.

Of the 185,000 vessels examined in 2002 under the VSC Program, 10,000 failed due to improper display of numbers. State marine patrol officers and Vessel Examiners (CFR) for the Vessel Safety Check (VSC) Program have noted several problems in the field, especially with newer sportier designed vessels where the owners want their numbers to match the designs and color schemes of their boats.

As a result, the Office of Boating Safety, as program manager, has been asked to provide program guidance on this issue. This letter serves to provide that guidance for Vessel Examiners of the U. S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, U. S. Power Squadrons, and the State providers for the Vessel Safety Check Program and state boating law enforcement agencies.

The manner in which numbers are to be displayed on vessels is prescribed under Title 33 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 173.27. The basic tenets of the regulation are, the numbers must:

- 1) be painted on or permanently attached to both sides of the forward half of the vessel,**
- 2) be in plain vertical block characters of not less than 3 inches in height,**
- 3) contrast with the color of the background and be distinctly visible and legible,**
- 4) have spaces or hyphens that are equal in width to a letter or number other than "I" or "1" between the letter and number groupings, and**
- 5) read from left to right.**

There are exemptions and exceptions for vessels operated by dealers for the purposes of demonstration, and for vessels due to their construction that cannot fully comply with the regulations as written.

The following is program guidance for applying the basic tenets as outlined.

The numbers must be painted on or permanently attached to both sides of the forward half of the vessel. Generally numbers are applied to the hull, but this is not required. Numbers may be applied to the superstructure or cabin sides, provided the placement is still on the forward half of the vessel. Self-adhesive numbers are accepted as permanently attached. Numbers may also be placed on placards or plates, and then bolted or screwed in place. Plates or placards may not be attached to removable stanchions or rails, nor may numbers be placed on glass windows, as they are not considered permanent attachment points.

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August 14, 2003