

Boating Tips



National Boating Safety Month

May is National Boating Safety Month. Every year, the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary (USCGA) and the United States Power Squadrons® (USPS) encourage recreational boaters to have their vessels inspected for safety. This vessel safety check (VSC) is available at no charge.

As a boating instructor, I feel it is important to practice what I preach. Our vessel *Her Way* received her vessel inspection on Feb. 15. So... what does a “vessel safety check” mean, and why should I get one, you ask?

Getting a vessel safety check means “boating smart from the start.” (To get info on getting a VSC go to www.safetyseal.net.) It’s not just about having the necessary safety gear onboard in case of emergencies. It’s also about knowing where all that gear is and ensuring that everything is in good working order after the winter season.

In addition to doing the safety check, the vessel examiner will discuss upgrading existing equipment, adding optional equipment such as ground tackle and VHF radios and give updates on new requirements for safe boating. This year I learned that flare guns should only be used if the vessel is at least two miles from shore. This is to prevent fires in hard-to-reach areas of the Delta and makes a lot of sense to me.

It should be noted that getting a VSC is voluntary and is not a “boarding” by law enforcement. No citations are ever given for safety infractions. Upon passing the test, you will receive a signed checklist of what was inspected

and a sticker to be placed on the port side of your vessel. Although having this sticker will not prevent law enforcement or CG from boarding your vessel, it will give a good first impression. (Trust me).

Volunteer Vessel Safety Check Examiners

This year our club split our annual vessel checks for club member

boats into two dates. USCGA vessel examiners Mr. Tony Leonardi and Mr. Bill Correll conducted the first check. USPS certified vessel examiners Mr. Don Webb and Mr. Joe Pustizzi conducted the second safety check.

The first group got their VSC at our February “cruise in” to the San Joaquin Yacht Club on Bethel Island the weekend of 2/15. The USCGA checked and passed a total of 14 vessels. The USPS did a total of 11 checks at our March cruise in to Tower Park Resort.

These four gentlemen and many more like them volunteer their personal time to conduct these vessel checks at no charge. But why? What motivates these folks to spend their valuable spare time checking other boater’s vessels when they could be out enjoying their own? Following are their responses to these questions.

Bill Correll:

You asked why I do this; my answer would be that I have spent most of my adult life in serving my community in one way or another. As I looked around after retiring, boating safety was high on my list of things I could still do to continue to

A typical VSC involves the following:

- Display of numbering or documentation
- Personal flotation devices (PFDs)
- Visual distress signal (coastal only)
- Fire extinguishers
- Ventilation
- Backfire flame control
- Sound-producing device
- Marpol (marine pollution) trash placard
- Marine sanitation devices
- Navigation lights
- Overall vessel condition
- As applies: Deck free of hazards, electrical/fuel systems, galley/heating systems



Rear Admiral Craig E. Bone, Commander Eleventh Coast Guard District.

help my community and country. I felt that working with the Coast Guard Auxiliary would give me the best opportunity to reduce the number of deaths on our inland waters by being directly involved in vessel examination and teaching boating safety to our fellow boaters.

Tony Leonardi:

The events of 9/11 prompted me to try to help my country in some way. I joined the USCGA five years ago so the CG could do what they do best: to guard and protect our coastline and save lives. At 79 years old my goal is to stay healthy so I can do more VSCs!

Don Webb:

I've been a USPS vessel examiner for two years and have been chairman for San Joaquin Delta Power Squadron for over two years.

As I have been navigating the coast from the Delta to Mexico for many years, and always checking the vessels for safety and the required items that should be carried onboard, I have grown to appreciate

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the Coast Guard in their diligence to both protect our borders and make sure that vessels are prepared with safety equipment onboard. Having been boarded many times and three times in one trip up the coast, I always welcomed them aboard with a smile, knowing that the vessel I was aboard would pass their muster, and no fines would be levied.

Getting a VSC does not exclude you from being “boarded” but when they do board you, you can smile and welcome them aboard, too.

If by doing vessel checks we can eliminate just one travesty, it is well worth my time.

Joe Pustizzi:

I'm proud to represent San Joaquin Delta Power Squadron as a vessel safety check examiner. I joined the USPS in August of 2005 due to their commitment to boater education and public service. Very few boats fail the exam. Most of the time, a boat owner can correct the problem while we are there, such as a faulty light bulb. If the problem requires a little more time to correct, we will come back when you are ready, as we really do want you to pass.

On one boat I checked, as I was in the engine bay, I heard a “snapping” sound. It seems that as I was looking around, my arm touched a positive battery cable. This cable ran along the side of the engine and was not secured, thus, allowing it to rub against the engine, which created a bare spot on the cable. The owner had no idea of this dangerous condition, which could have led to a fire.

On another vessel that I checked, I discovered a substantial gas leak from a bad fuel line. The owner said he never smelled gas, but his wife said she could, now and then. She kept complaining about it, but because he couldn't smell it, he told her all was okay. When I showed him the gas leak, he sat down with a shocked look on his face. He understood what the consequences could have been. This is why we volunteer our time and money. There are other things in life that we can be doing, as we do have our own personal lives, and interests. But, I believe that vessel examiners save lives, and property, which is my motivation.

My goal is to continue the work of the last two years. The handshake of a new friend is my compensation.

Kevo's Tip:

This month, I defer to a higher authority to give all recreational boaters in NorCal a tip:

“A vessel safety check is the next best thing to taking a boating safety course to ensure you have a safe boating experience. The Coast Guard Auxiliary and U.S. Power Squadrons provide them free of charge. They'll go through your boat checking all your safety equipment and explain why each piece is important.” – Rear Admiral Craig E. Bone, Commander, Eleventh Coast Guard District, Coast Guard Island, Alameda, CA.

I can't wait to whip out his card next time I get boarded. HA!

As always, feedback is appreciated. I can be reached at 925/890-8428 or kevo@yachtsmanmagazine.com. Be safe & happy boating! ⚓



Left to right: Joe Pustizzi and Don Webb of the U.S. Power Squadron and the second gang of SBC members to receive their 2008 VSC stickers.



Left to right: Bill Correll and Tony Leonardi of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and the first Sacramento Bayliner Club gang to receive their 2008 VSC stickers.