

Five Stars for Safety

Small, uninspected passenger vessel operations have expanded dramatically over the last few years, and Alaska has seen its share of this expansion. Thousands of locals and tourists embark on these “6-pack” vessels, so called because they carry six or less passengers, every year.

However, these smaller passenger vessels are uninspected and allowed to operate without life rafts, Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons (EPIRBs), or backup emergency communications. This equates to a higher level of risk for every passenger and crew member.

The Coast Guard in Alaska, in conjunction with local harbor masters and the uninspected passenger vessel industry, has recently implemented a new Five-Star Safety Rating Program to increase the safety level of these vessels. This voluntary program rates vessel owners on their safety upgrades — those that implement all of the program’s suggestions can earn a Five-Star Safety Rating for their craft.

Coast Guard Captain Ed Page, Chief of Marine Safety in Alaska, explained his ideas on this Safety Program in a related press release: “I’m advocating a non-regulatory solution, referred to as the Five-Star Safety Program, for improving the safety of these vessels. . . . This program outlines a suite of recommended safety measures, and is designed to provide safety-conscious operators recognition for their efforts to provide a safer vessel for their passengers.”

With the Five-Star Safety Program, passengers can choose the level of safety they desire. The focus of passengers on increased safety will in turn encourage operators to upgrade their safety equipment and earn five stars.

★ Vessel is in compliance with existing regulations, including the requirements found in 46 CFR, Subchapter C. The operator has a safety-training program and a system of records to show that drills and training have been conducted regularly. The training program must include drills on emergency procedures and the use of safety equipment.

★★ Vessel meets all One-Star requirements, and additionally has a properly installed bilge pump and bilge alarm. If the vessel is designed without a bilge, it must have suitable reserve buoyancy to float the vessel, even if it is in a completely swamped condition.

★★★ Vessel meets all Two-Star requirements, and additionally has a handheld VHF FM radio with a minimum 5 watts of power. A portable satellite phone can be used as an equivalent level of safety.

★★★★ Vessel meets all Three-Star requirements, and additionally has a properly mounted and registered 406 MHz EPIRB, Category I or II.

★★★★★ Vessel meets all Four-Star requirements, and additionally has on board a properly installed and serviced Coast Guard-approved inflatable life raft or inflatable buoyant apparatus (IBA) (canister or valise type) with minimum capacity for all passengers on board. An equivalent level of safety for vessels too small to carry a liferaft or IBA would be floatation that meets Coast Guard standards. In some instances, upon review of the examiner, an inflatable-style commercial grade work boat may be used in place of an approved raft.

Owners and operators of uninspected passenger vessels are encouraged to participate in this voluntary program. An application form may be obtained from local Coast Guard offices in Alaska or via the Internet at: www.akrrt.org/spvtaskforce/6pac/application.html.

For more information, contact LCDR Spencer Wood, 17th Coast Guard District, at (907) 463-2285 or e-mail: swood@cgalaska.uscg.mil.

PRINCIPLES

- Take a Quality Approach
- Honor the Mariner
- Seek Non-Regulatory Solutions
- Share Commitment
- Manage Risk

VISION

To achieve the world’s safest, most environmentally sound and cost-effective marine operations by emphasizing the role of people in preventing casualties and pollution.

GOALS

- Know More
- Train More
- Do More
- Offer More
- Cooperate More

Contact us directly with your PTP story:

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