



UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

MARINE SAFETY ALERT

Inspections and Compliance Directorate

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Safety Alert 07-16

STEM TO STERN, FOAM TO DUST

INSPECTING YOUR LIFEJACKETS IS A MUST!

This safety alert reminds all vessel operators to routinely inspect their lifejackets to ensure they are suitable for service. Recently Coast Guard inspectors in Key West, Florida discovered two vessels that had over 60 lifejackets that were required to be removed and destroyed. It was discovered that the unicellular foam buoyant material within the nylon outer shell had degraded significantly over time, broke apart, crumbled and in some instances was reduced to dust. The lifejackets were properly stored, kept dry, and not under direct sunlight; however, the location was very hot at times.

These particular lifejackets were the Type 1, 160RT model distributed by "The Safeguard Corporation" of Covington, Kentucky. They were manufactured in China and approximately nine years old. The distributor is no longer in business. Over the years, the Coast Guard has distributed a number of other safety alerts related to lifejackets and personal flotation devices (PFDs). The archive of alerts can be accessed at the following site: http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg5/cg545/alerts/96_14SA.pdf. See PDF page numbers 27, 72, 138, 145, 158 and 165.

As a result of this recent discovery the Coast Guard **strongly recommends** that vessel owners and operators inspect their Type 1 unicellular plastic foam lifejackets for potential indications of failure or degradation, specifically:

- Compression: The lifejacket may be compressed from many years of stowage.
- Loss of resiliency: The lifejacket is excessively hard, stiff or its foam is brittle. Normally after compressing the lifejacket to about half its initial thickness, the foam should expand to its original dimension in a short period of time.
- Shrinkage: A physical reduction in size may be indicated by "wrinkling" of the coating on vinyl dipped type or by a loose fitting shell on a fabric-covered lifejacket.
- Manufacturer: While the potential for problems applies to all older PFDs, those manufactured by "The Safeguard Corporation" should be closely examined.

This Safety Alert was developed by the Coast Guard Headquarters Office of Investigations and Casualty Analysis in conjunction with the Inspections Division of Coast Guard Sector Key West. Any questions or comments should be sent to send to: HQS-PF-fldr-CG-INV@uscg.mil.

