



UNITED STATES COAST GUARD
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

MARINE SAFETY ALERT

Inspections and Compliance Directorate

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Safety Alert 09-03

LIFE JACKET STORAGE AND ACCESSIBILITY

A few years ago a small passenger vessel approved to carry several hundred passengers experienced an engine room fire during an otherwise routine voyage. At the time of the casualty, there were only three crewmembers and eight adult passengers onboard. Crewmember efforts to extinguish the fire were unsuccessful. As a result, the fire and smoke spread quickly. Early during the event, the passengers were directed to move to the bow of the vessel. Some time later they were provided several life jackets from a storage locker located at the rear of the main cabin. One adult was given a child size life jacket. Some passengers had difficulty donning the life jackets. Fortunately, another vessel arrived on scene to aid the burning vessel. The passengers and crewmembers were able to disembark the burning vessel by stepping across the bow on to the assisting vessel. Damage to the vessel exceeded one million dollars and associated injuries were minor.

As a result of this casualty, the U.S. Coast Guard recommends that small passenger vessel operators review the distribution of life jackets onboard their vessels to ensure compliance with federal life jacket storage requirements.

Stowage of life jackets

- Life jackets must be stored in convenient places distributed throughout accommodation spaces.
- Each stowage container for life jackets must not be capable of being locked. If practicable, the container must be designed to allow the life jackets to float free.
- Each life jacket kept in a stowage container must be readily available.
- Each life jacket stowed overhead must be supported in a manner that allows quick release for distribution.
- If life jackets are stowed more than 2.13 meters or 7 feet above the deck, a means for quick release must be provided and must be capable of operation by a person standing on the deck.
- Each child size life jacket must be stowed in a location that is appropriately marked and separated from adult life jackets so the child size life jackets are not mistaken for adult life jackets.
- The stowage locations of the personal flotation devices carried in addition to life jackets must be separate from the life jackets, and such as not to be easily confused with that of the life jackets.

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