

U.S. Department of
Homeland Security

United States
Coast Guard



Commandant
United States Coast Guard

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February 12, 2016

To: All Coast Guard approved life float and rigid buoyant apparatus manufacturers

Subj: LIFE FLOATS AND RIGID BUOYANT APPARATUS APPROVALS

In our letters dated April 6, 2011 and July 1, 2015, we notified you that life floats and rigid buoyant apparatus would no longer be approved as survival craft after February 26, 2016. We cited the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-281) and the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-213), where Congress prohibited the approval of survival craft unless the craft ensures that no part of an individual is immersed in water.

However, on February 8, 2016, President Obama signed the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2015 (P.L. 114-120), significantly altering the previous mandate.

The Coast Guard is reviewing the revised statute to determine the applicability to, and impact on, current regulations. However, two items are clear: We are no longer prohibited from approving life floats and buoyant apparatus as survival craft, and there is no statutory requirement for existing vessels to replace their life floats and buoyant apparatus with of survival craft that ensures that no part of an individual is immersed in water.

In light of the above, we will be extending approval certificates for life floats and buoyant apparatus. Please inform us if you intend to continue manufacturing these products so we can update the certificates accordingly. Please include the specific USCG approval numbers relevant to the certificates you wish to extend, along with confirmation that the product continues to be made with the same design, materials, and construction as originally approved, and that all required production testing has been conducted.

Please feel free to contact me or Ms. Jacqi Yurkovich of my staff if you have any questions regarding approval of life floats and buoyant apparatus. For questions regarding vessel carriage requirements, please see Marine Safety Information Bulletins 002/16 and 004/16, which can be found at www.uscg.mil/msib.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "B. A. Baldwin".

B. A. BALDWIN
Chief, Lifesaving and Fire Safety Division
U. S. Coast Guard
By direction

Encl: Excerpt of P.L. 114-120

Copy: U.S. Marine Safety Association

Section 301 of the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2015 (P.L. 114-120)

Section 3104 of title 46, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

“§ 3104. Survival craft

“(a) REQUIREMENT TO EQUIP.—The Secretary shall require that a passenger vessel be equipped with survival craft that ensures that no part of an individual is immersed in water, if—

“(1) such vessel is built or undergoes a major conversion after January 1, 2016; and

“(2) operates in cold waters as determined by the Secretary.

“(b) HIGHER STANDARD OF SAFETY.—The Secretary may revise part 117 or part 180 of title 46, Code of Federal Regulations, as in effect before January 1, 2016, if such revision provides a higher standard of safety than is provided by the regulations in effect on or before the date of the enactment of the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2015.

“(c) INNOVATIVE AND NOVEL DESIGNS.—The Secretary may, in lieu of the requirements set out in part 117 or part 180 of title 46, Code of Federal Regulations, as in effect on the date of the enactment of the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2015, allow a passenger vessel to be equipped with a life-saving appliance or arrangement of an innovative or novel design that—

“(1) ensures no part of an individual is immersed in water; and

“(2) provides an equal or higher standard of safety than is provided by such requirements as in effect before such date of the enactment.

“(d) BUILT DEFINED.—In this section, the term ‘built’ has the meaning that term has under section 4503(e).”.