




16702
CG-ENG
Policy Letter 02-21
August 1, 2021

From: 
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COMDT (CG-ENG)

To: Distribution

Subj: ADOPTION OF ANSI/CAN/UL 12402-4

Ref: (a) ANSI/CAN/UL 12402-4, Standard for Personal Flotation Devices – Part 4: Lifejackets, Performance Level 100 – Safety Requirements [UL 12402-4]

(b) ANSI/CAN/UL 12402-9, Standard for Personal Flotation Devices – Part 9: Test Methods [UL12402-9]

1. Purpose. This policy letter provides guidance for obtaining U. S. Coast Guard (USCG) approval of lifejackets that provide a level of safety at least equivalent to a PFD meeting the requirements of 46 CFR 160.055 using references (a) and (b).
2. Background.
 - a. The USCG has statutory authority under Title 46, U.S. Code, Sections 3306 (a) & (b), 4102 (a) & (b), 4302(a), and 4502(a) & (c)(2)(B) to prescribe regulations for the design, construction, performance, testing, carriage, use, and inspection of lifesaving equipment on commercial and recreational vessels. Under 46 CFR 159.005-7(c), the USCG has the authority to approve an item of equipment that does not meet all of the requirements of 46 CFR 160.055 if it has equivalent performance characteristics.

An item of equipment or material that does not meet all of the requirements of this subchapter for design or performance may be approved by the Commandant if it has equivalent performance characteristics. The item has equivalent performance characteristics if the application and any approval tests prescribed by the Commandant, in place of or in addition to the approval tests required by this subchapter, demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Commandant that the item is at least as effective as one that meets the requirements of this subchapter.
 - b. 46 CFR 160.055-9 allows for the approval of non-standard life preservers that have equivalent materials and construction to those of a standard life preserver.
 - c. In 2008, the USCG and Transport Canada (TC), in cooperation with members of the PFD industry, began the task of harmonizing PFD standards with ISO 12402, the current international standard, to create a single North American standard for PFD approval.

References (a) and (b) were accredited by American National Standards Institute (ANSI) & Standards Council of Canada (SCC) and subsequently published as national standards in the U.S. and Canada in 2020 and 2015, respectively. UL 12402-4 provides requirements for Level 100 lifejackets. UL 12402-9 provides test methods.

- d. In April 2017, the USCG and TC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining intended cooperation for approval of personal lifesaving appliances that comply with mutually acceptable standards, are tested by mutually accepted conformity assessment bodies (or independent test laboratories), and are covered by a mutually acceptable follow-up program.

3. Discussion.

- a. The USCG and TC supported and participated in the development of UL 12402-4 and UL 12402-9. These standards were developed by an expert Standards Technical Panel (STP) to replace, in part, standards and specifications incorporated by reference into US regulations, and legacy standard UL 1123: Marine Buoyant Devices. Adopting UL 12402-4 will allow manufacturers the opportunity to produce more innovative equipment that meets the approval requirements of both Canada and the United States.
- b. The USCG has determined that Level 100 lifejackets that meet the requirements of UL 12402-4 using inherently buoyant material provide equivalent performance to a non-standard lifejacket meeting the requirements of 46 CFR 160.055. Level 100 lifejackets provide face-up flotation with a level of support sufficient for open water use and turn most users face-up, even when the user is unconscious.
- c. At this time, we have only evaluated the performance of inherently buoyant Level 100 lifejackets. Lifejackets that rely partly or entirely on inflation for buoyancy cannot be approved via this policy. Manufacturers must meet all of the requirements in 46 CFR 160.176 for inflatable lifejackets intended for carriage on inspected vessels, including at least two inflation chambers and a plan for periodic servicing.

4. Action.

- a. Independent laboratories which are recognized by both the USCG and TC should update their procedures to accommodate evaluation and testing according to UL 12402-4 and UL 12402-9.
- b. Manufacturers should consider using UL 12402-4 and UL 12402-9 when designing new lifejackets.

5. Compliance.

- a. Effective August 1, 2021, the USCG will accept Level 100 lifejackets complying with UL 12402-4 using inherently buoyant material, and tested according to UL 12402-9, as equivalent to life preservers meeting the requirements in 46 CFR 160.055.

- b. This policy does not cover inflatable lifejackets or SOLAS lifejackets. The approval process and requirements for these devices are not changed by this policy.
 - c. There is no action required by lifejacket users. Currently approved life preservers and lifejackets will maintain their approval and meet carriage requirements as long as the equipment is in serviceable condition and is used according to the approval and markings per the applicable carriage requirements.
6. Approval Series.
- a. Inherently buoyant lifejackets that meet the requirements of UL 12402-4 will be approved under approval series 160.255, as defined by 46 CFR 199.30.
7. Additional Considerations.
- a. *Safety and training.* Devices that are approved to and meet the requirements of UL 12402-4 provide an equivalent level of safety to devices meeting 46 CFR 160.055. Members of the boating community, including owners and operators, retailers, law enforcement, and manufacturers should familiarize themselves with the new labels and level designations. Lifejackets must be used in accordance with the label per the applicable carriage requirements.
 - b. *Existing Lifejackets.* Life preservers and lifejackets that were approved prior to the effective date of this policy are not affected. Currently approved equipment will maintain their approval and continue to meet carriage requirements if they are in good serviceable condition and are used in accordance with the label per the applicable carriage requirements.
8. Disclaimer. The guidance in this policy letter is not a substitute for applicable legal requirements and is not a rule. It is not intended to impose legally-binding requirements on any party. This guidance represents the USCG's current thinking on this topic and may assist industry, mariners, the public, and the Coast Guard, as well as other Federal and state regulators, in applying statutory and regulatory requirements. An alternative approach for complying with these requirements is acceptable, if the approach satisfies the requirements of the applicable statutes and regulations.
9. Contact Us. Questions concerning equipment approval should be directed to Commandant (CG-ENG-4), Commercial Regulations and Standards Directorate, Office of Design and Engineering Standards, Lifesaving and Fire Safety Division at TypeApproval@uscg.mil.

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