



Yacht and Powerboat Safety at Sea - Stowage of Life-Saving Appliances - Good Practice

Notice to all owners, managing agents, skippers, designers, builders, surveyors, crew and Certifying Authorities of yachts and powerboats including pleasure vessels and small commercial vessels.

This notice should be read with:

The Merchant Shipping (Vessels in Commercial Use for Sport or Pleasure) Regulations 1998 (SI 1998/2771) as amended;*

The Safety of Small Commercial Motor Vessels - A Code of Practice (Yellow)

The Safety of Small Commercial Sailing Vessels - A Code of Practice (Blue)

The Safety of Small Vessels in Commercial Use for Sport or Pleasure Operating from a Nominated Departure Point (NDP) - A Code of Practice (Red)

The Merchant Shipping (Small Workboats and Pilot Boats) Regulations 1998 (SI 1998/1609) as amended;*

*The Safety of Small Workboats and Pilot Boats - A Code of Practice (Brown) ;
and MGN 280*

Summary

- Where a life-saving appliance (LSA) is placed or stowed on board a vessel will affect its effectiveness when required.
- This guidance looks to give some advice which should be read in conjunction with any manufacturer's recommendations.
- This guidance is non-mandatory for pleasure vessels.
- This MGN is one of six MGNs aimed at providing generic good practice safety advice.

1. Introduction

1.1 Life-saving appliances are found on nearly every vessel going to sea and range from personal floatation devices (such as lifejackets) through to liferafts. Some items are rarely used but are carried in the event of an emergency.

1.2 This guidance looks to provide advice to owners of pleasure vessels and Small Commercial Vessels in respect of the stowage of life-saving appliances. Where a manufacturer produces specific instructions for the stowage of a life-saving appliance, they should be followed ahead of this guidance.



1.3 Life-saving appliances should not be considered an eyesore. They are designed for immediate use and if stowed down below, in a locker or out of sight, their effectiveness is significantly reduced. Most life-saving appliances are designed to be stowed outside on a voyage and are packaged to be protected from the elements, however the stowage recommendations of the manufacturer should be followed where possible.

1.4 For the purposes of this MGN:

“Small Commercial Vessel” means a vessel which is certificated under one of the Yellow, Blue, Red or Brown Codes.

“Pleasure Vessel” has the meaning given in the Merchant Shipping (Vessels in Commercial use for Sport or Pleasure) Regulations 1998, as amended¹.

2. Liferafts

2.1 A liferaft is the last resort for a vessel which is foundering. Its location on a vessel should be carefully considered to accommodate a wide number of emergency scenarios that might occur and which may vary depending on the type of vessel and its area of operation.

2.2 The two means of launching a liferaft. A liferaft can be launched manually (a conscious decision to launch a liferaft) or automatically (a launch based on an unintended action of the vessel). These two scenarios should be the primary considerations when determining the most effective overall stowage position of a liferaft and the means of securing the liferaft to the vessel.

2.3 In the case of a manual launch, consideration of the distance to the guard rails and the amount of manoeuvring required to launch should be made. A canister liferaft is a heavy piece of equipment, with a 12 person ISO 9650 raft weighing as much as 100kg. Minimising the amount of manoeuvring to a launch point will also reduce the risk of incurring injuries if control of the liferaft canister is lost, especially if looking to launch the liferaft in a rough sea state. The launching of a liferaft should not endanger those on board the vessel.

2.4 An automatic launch (normally referred to as a float free arrangement) is designed such that where there is a catastrophic failure of the vessel, and where there is no time to launch the liferaft manually, the liferaft will float free from the vessel as it sinks and will inflate. Consideration should be given to the positioning of the liferaft on the vessel so as to enable it to effectively free itself from the vessel without entanglement in rigging or the vessel's superstructure. An understanding of how a vessel may sink may further influence the location of a liferaft in a float free arrangement. For example, a motor vessel will normally sink stern first as this is where the engines normally influence the trim of the vessel sinking. For a sailing vessel, in the event of a keel loss, where practical the liferaft should also be accessible when the hull is in an inverted position.

2.5 For pleasure vessels built in accordance with Recreational Craft Regulations 2017 (which gives legal effect in the UK to the EU Recreational Craft Directive), there is a requirement for a vessel to be designed with a specific liferaft location onboard the vessel. This is referenced within the owner's manual. Owners should consider whether the stowage position of a liferaft is suitable in light of this guidance.

2.6 Further consideration should also be given to the scenario of an engine fire, which is especially relevant for motor vessels. If there is a large engine fire, the safest spot for stowage location of the liferaft and embarkation point may be at the bow of the boat.



2.7 Information on further requirements, considerations and details on liferaft stowage for Small Commercial Vessels, which also provides sound guidance for pleasure vessels, can be found in [MGN 343 here](#).

3. Personal Floatation Devices

3.1 Every vessel should be equipped with personal floatation devices for those onboard. Whilst there is no regulation to require a personal floatation device to be worn whilst afloat, this should be considered as good practice. In scenarios where there is a risk of falling overboard, a personal floatation device should be worn as protection to the individual. A personal floatation device is most effective when it is specifically fitted to the wearer. There are a number of different types of personal floatation devices which range from a 50N buoyancy aid through to a 275N lifejacket. Each will be designed to support the wearer in the water in different ways and an owner, managing agent or skipper should ensure that the right type of personal floatation device is worn for the activity being undertaken and give a briefing on their use where appropriate.

3.2 Personal floatation devices are made from materials that can be affected by prolonged exposure to sunlight and saltwater and therefore when the vessel is not being used, they should be stored in a dry, dark location on the vessel. This is to avoid deterioration of the materials.

3.3 An inflatable lifejacket will normally contain a metallic gas canister and firing mechanism and it is important after each use to rinse the lifejacket with fresh water and hang it up to dry after each usage in order to prevent unnecessary corrosion.

3.4 For Small Commercial Vessels, donning instructions for lifejackets should be kept on board as well as spare gas canisters (if a lifejacket is inflated); this will enable the correct use and re-arming of a lifejacket, maintaining its effective use for the duration of the voyage. Owners, managing agents and skippers should make themselves aware of any re-arming instructions and equipment required.

3.5 Regular inspection of the lifejacket could reveal a potential defect. The gas cylinder over time can vibrate loose and the green/red tell tales that inform the user of possible malfunction can change over time, especially if the lifejacket has been set off. Checking both the tightness of the cylinder and the arming tell tales should be considered as part of the regular inspection of a vessel's lifesaving appliances.

4. Lifebuoys and Danbuoys

4.1 A lifebuoy or danbuoy is used for aiding a person who has fallen overboard and is designed to assist in their recovery. For a lifebuoy and danbuoy to be most effective, it needs to be deployed as close to the person in the water as possible. This will give the person in the water the best chance of using the equipment with minimal swimming.

4.2 Positioning the lifebuoys and danbuoys at the transom will ensure that the deployment will be as close to the person in the water as possible as the vessel moves past them. The transom location is also normally near the helm position where a crew member is likely to be stationed, increasing the chances of a successful deployment.

4.3 Lifebuoys and danbuoys are used in a person overboard situation. It is strongly advised prior to a voyage that the skipper and crew discuss what action should be taken in the event that a person falls overboard and make themselves aware of all of the equipment on board, and how to use it, which may aid the successful recovery of a person overboard.



4.4 If lifebuoys or danbuoys are of the inflatable type, for longer non-coastal voyages spare gas canisters should be carried such that the lifebuoys can remain functional after their initial use. Owners, managing agents and skippers should make themselves aware of any re-arming instructions and equipment required.

5. Servicing

5.1 All life-saving appliances, in order to ensure the proper functionality, will need to be periodically checked and serviced. The manufacturer's servicing requirements should be followed as well as any additional care instructions.

5.2 The servicing information contained within MGN 553 and MGN 548 should also be considered to be good practice advice for pleasure vessels dependent on the type of equipment installed.

Note

* A consolidated copy of an amended statutory instrument can be made available upon request

¹ A Pleasure Vessel is a vessel which is either (a) wholly owned by an individual or individuals and used only for the sport or pleasure of the owner or owners or their immediate family or friends; or (b) owned by a body corporate and used only for sport or pleasure by the employees or officers or the body corporate or their immediate family or friends. In scenarios (a) or (b) the owner or owners must not receive money or any other payment for such use other than as a contribution towards the direct expenses incurred in relation to the operation of the vessel during the voyage or excursion in question. A vessel will also be a pleasure vessel if it is (c) wholly owned by or on behalf of a members' club formed for the purpose of sport or pleasure and used only for the sport or pleasure of members of that club or their immediate family. Any charges levied for such use must be paid into club funds and applied for the general use of the club.

More Information

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