



Maritime &
Coastguard
Agency

MARINE INFORMATION NOTE

MIN 687

Changes to how individuals can dispose of redundant marine flares

Notice to all leisure craft, fishermen, shipping service providers, marinas, harbourmasters, life-saving equipment servicing stations, chandlers and suppliers.

This MIN expires 12 October 2023.

Summary

This Marine Information Note highlights how from 31 December 2022 HM Coastguard will stop offering a voluntary, public-facing flare disposal service to private individuals who have personal flares to dispose of. From that date, private individuals will need to use a third-party disposal service to dispose of their personal flares. This note offers guidance to private individuals on how to dispose of their flares, and private businesses that may wish to offer a disposal service.

1. Introduction

From 31 December 2022 HM Coastguard will stop offering a voluntary, public-facing flare disposal service to private individuals who have personal flares to dispose of.

This page provides updated advice and guidance for those who have flares to dispose of. It also gives information about third-party disposal service providers that can help private individuals meet their legal obligation to dispose of flares safely. It also provides guidance for those organisations (businesses, boating clubs or any other commercial entity) that may wish to offer some form of deposit and/or disposal service to their customers or members.

The information provided here is aimed at supporting both private individuals who may have redundant flares to dispose of, as well as businesses offering a disposal service. This will help ensure that all parties can meet their legal obligations when discarding or disposing of flares.

Under the Explosives Regulations 2014, any person who discards or disposes of explosives or explosive-contaminated items, must ensure that they are disposed of safely and that there are no risks to health and safety of others or which risks damage to property. It is an offence not to do so.

2. Contact details for third-party disposal service providers

[The Green Blue webpage](#), hosted jointly between British Marine and the Royal Yachting Association provides contact details of registered disposal service providers.

These listed businesses offer not only a disposal service for private individuals, but can also offer guidance and advice in supporting you to dispose of your unwanted flares. Such information is aimed at:

- helping you physically inspect and check a flare
- packing it safely
- taking the right steps to transport it to a disposal facility, if a collection service is not available

Both the Department of Transport (DfT) and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) have worked with the pleasure vessel sector and sector disposal services in taking forward a trustworthy and reliable set of solutions that are aimed at providing local solutions for local needs.

If you need to dispose of flares you should look at the list to see if there is a provider based near you (by boat or by car). If not, you may be able to dispose of your flares at:

- the place where you bought them
- local marinas
- possibly life raft services
- local authorities
- waste disposal businesses, some of whom do may already offer a disposal service

Other service providers offer disposal events across the country, usually at popular harbours or marinas.

None of the providers or the services offered by the providers has been endorsed by the DfT or the MCA and should not be seen in that context. The purpose of the list is to enable private individuals with an easy-to-access routes and information for disposing of their flares.

3. Disposal of flares and the law

By law, flares used for distress signalling, are considered as explosive devices and should be treated accordingly with regard to their handling, storage, transportation, eventual disposal and destruction. Anyone in possession of flares, whether they're private individuals or businesses, remains responsible for them until such time as they have been properly disposed of.

A private individuals must never, under any circumstances:

- fire a flare, at sea or on land, except in an emergency to raise the alarm or alert others
- dispose, discard or dump flares anywhere, whether at sea or on land
- dispose of any redundant flare without doing so safely
- ignore the potential health and safety impacts to others or on the coastal and marine environment
- dispose of flares in household or garden waste or at recycling centres
- abandon flares
- receive or store any flares for another person, unless they can do so safely and in compliance with any licensing requirements that may apply

Flares in your possession that have time-expired or are damaged should not be used and they must be disposed of safely as soon as possible.

You should not contact HM Coastguard to dispose of your flares after December 2022.

4. Responsibilities of private individuals regarding flares

As a private individual you're responsible for the flares you have in your possession from the point of acquiring them to the point that you dispose of them. This means that whenever you purchase flares you become entirely responsible for their maintenance, safe storage, transportation, handling and, eventually, disposal, irrespective of whether the flare has time-expired, is damaged or no longer needed.

You should get professional advice on the correct methods for disposing of flares or transporting them to a certified disposal service provider, at all times ensuring that you take reasonable steps to reduce or remove the risk of endangering anyone else or risking damage to property.

You should also seek professional advice if you inherit old flares – for example, when purchasing a boat or finding them during a house move.

Time-expired flares

You should find information on how to dispose of time-expired flares before they expire.

Flares that have expired do not necessarily become more dangerous or unstable, but after their expiry date they do begin to degrade. The components used to provide smoke and light can become less effective. This is why you should ensure that flares are stored and maintained properly. You should also note the expiry date on individual flares to make sure you replace them in time.

Damaged flares

You should get professional advice as soon as you become aware of any damaged flares. Do not attempt to use them and handle them with great care.

It's in your interests to arrange their disposal as soon as is possible. You should also wrap such devices in non-static materials such as cardboard or paper packing, and use plastic tape to cover damaged areas. You can then put them into sealable plastic bag to prevent any leakage of the chemical compounds. You should, where possible, also pack them in a strong cardboard box.

Flares are generally safe products and even in cases where damage may appear more severe, some simple precautions, as already described, can reduce any risks.

Storing and transporting flares

If you're a pleasure vessel boatowner it's reasonable to suppose that you may have between 6 and 12 flares to dispose of once every 3 or 4 years, whenever the expiry applies from the manufacturer. You can transport such small quantities in your own vehicles to a third-party disposal service provider for destruction. This is provided that you've made all reasonable efforts to pack and secure such devices to reduce any health or safety risks to you or anyone else.

Receiving flares from others

You should never accept or receive flares from anyone else. This applies to private individuals as well as well-intentioned organisations such as yachting or boating clubs or associations. Unless you or they have appropriate storage facilities and correct transportation arrangements, both individuals and businesses may come into scope of the rules governing the handling, storing and transportation of explosives. You should speak to a professional, such as the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) or your local authority about the rules around licensing and storage.

5. Responsibilities of organisations or businesses

Any business may see a commercial opportunity to offer a flare disposal service to those private individuals wishing to dispose of their unwanted flares. Such businesses could include:

- chandlers
- marinas
- yachting and boating clubs
- charities engaged in pleasure vessel activities
- recycling and waste management businesses

There are 2 ways that a business may be able to offer a service to private individuals.

A receipt service

With this solution a business can agree to receive a limited number of flares from private individuals. They will then store them on site until a contracted third-party disposal service provider can take them away. This arrangement depends on the public-facing business having sufficient and appropriate storage space and facilities to hold more than 5kg of hazard type 3 or 4 (hazard type refers in this case to flares and is very approximately more than 60 handheld flares, although this would also be dependent on the type and condition of the flares themselves).

The hazard type itself is determined by the type of individual flare, its condition, and how they're packaged and may, in some instances, depend on whether they're in a mix of different types of flares. Quantities will be defined by the net explosive mass (NEM), which should be clearly printed on each flare, as should the hazard value.

The business offering the service can determine the cost to the private individual. This cost would be used to pay for a contractor to provide storage boxes, training, if required, advice and collection. Such arrangements would require at risk assessment to establish the suitability of the premises or storage spaces to be used. This would also ensure that people engaged in these activities are appropriately trained and given the correct protective clothing and equipment to inspect, handle and store flares.

A complete disposal service

With this solution a business may be able to offer a full disposal service. That is to say that they have the space and required facilities to receive flares directly from a private individual, store them and destroy them in line with the regulatory framework for handling explosives.

Costs associated with such a service will be for the individual business entity to determine based on their business model and what kind of service they can offer. People engaged in these activities must be appropriately trained and given the correct protective clothing and equipment to inspect, handle and store flares.

For further information on offering a business solution to private individuals visit the [Health and Safety Executive's Explosive Regulation guidance](#).

Businesses can register their services on the [Green Blue website](#) to reach more potential customers.

6. Further support

The Department for Transport (DfT) and HM Coastguard recognises the challenges that the sector faces in developing and achieving a truly independent set of schemes that best serve boatowners and those with redundant pyrotechnics. Both DfT and HM Coastguard recognise the technical obstacles and challenges that those businesses considering offering a service may encounter and will continue to support and guide businesses to develop their own compliant solutions.

More information

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