

Vessel Safety Check Corner

By D/Lt Allan B. Furtado, SN

In the past I spent some time talking about a neglected item on your boat, Batteries. Well it is not the only item put away and forgotten about. This item is your fire extinguishers. Yes, I bet you never think about this life saving tool as something you should pay attention to.

You may think that this statement is silly but the most important thing to know about your fire extinguishers is “Where are they?” You would not believe how many times that a boater cannot remember where they are when I start my VSC. It is preferred that all fire extinguishers be mounted in a prominent and handy place. The more the better!

The first thing that a Vessel Safety Check Examiner will do is ask the boater to see their fire extinguishers. At this time we look at the gauge to see if the pressure is still within the range as marked to propel the powder inside if needed.

The next thing is to make sure that the Safety Pin is still installed so the extinguisher could not be accidentally discharged. This pin is usually just a red ring that is pushed under the handle to prevent it from being squeezed. Others are a thin plastic band that essentially does the same thing.

Being that the boater does not usually pay attention to this item, it sits under some protected space, sometimes hidden (not a great idea) and sometimes mounted prominently somewhere it can readily be found and used in an emergency. Because of the extinguisher’s inactivity the powder inside falls to the bottom and cakes there. If this extinguisher was needed in an emergency it might not provide all of the powder it should.

To prevent such a situation we (the VSC Examiners) demonstrate how to keep the extinguishers viable. The extinguisher is turned upside down and tapped rather hard on the bottom to loosen the powder. Then the extinguisher is twirled (rotated) between our hands to further loosen the powder. We then turn it up right and twirl it again. This is repeated several times until we can feel the powder slide from end to end as we tilt the extinguisher from upright to upside down slowly.

This exercise should be performed from time to time. I suggest that it be done monthly but I will bet you a dollar to a donut that the only time it gets done is when I perform it during the annual Vessel Safety Check.

Now that you know how to perform this exercise, have you done it yet this year? In addition, have you had your Free Vessel Safety Check this year? If not, why not?

Note: D/Lt Allan Furtado, SN is a member of the United States Power Squadron