



Homeland  
Security

U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary  
District 11 Northern Region  
*Serving Northern California, Nevada, Utah*



## VESSEL SAFETY CHECK (VSC) ON A PERSONAL WATERCRAFT (PWC)

Recently, I have received numerous questions on performing a Vessel Safety Check (VSC) on a personal watercraft. Except for navigation lights, the U.S. Coast Guard considers personal watercraft Class A vessels which means all safety equipment and operation laws that apply to a boat under 16 feet also apply to a PWC. California, Nevada, and Utah all have slightly different requirements and there may be additional requirements for local areas. Please review the requirements in the geographical location where the VSC is to be performed. Coastal waters will be different than bays or inland protected waters because of VDS. The VSC should take NO longer than 15-minutes. The VSC Manual M 16796.8A and the ANSC # 7012 form both have limited information on performing a VSC for PWCs, This guide follows the ANSC # 7012 form on topics (1-15) listed as "Vessel Safety Check Decal Requirements". It will discuss the VSC requirements and will explain each requirement. It also discusses some of the "Recommended and Discussion Items" found on the right side of the form, but not in the same fashion. For example, I always recommend having a tow rope and a small anchor. I always discuss wake jumping and operating near shore which can be dangerous for erosion and potentially costly because PWCs can pick up small rocks and sand. Finally, the Vessel Safety Check (VSC) program ensures proper equipment; however, the one-on-one education with the owner/operator is very important. The following check list which follows the 7012 form:

### VESSEL SAFETY CHECK DECAL REQUIREMENTS

1. **NUMBERING:** The PWC is a motor powered vessel. The requirements for lettering are EXACTLY the same as all other vessels. The numbers need to be block, 3" in height, contrasting color, and properly spaced. In California, Nevada, and Utah the year decal is placed on the stern side of the numbers. In Utah, the month of expiration decal must be displayed immediately aft of the year decal. In addition, the CF#'s (NV, UT) need to be on the forward ½ of the vessel and permanently attached to each side. This requirement also applies to the on older stand-up models with a narrow nose cowl cover. This is a Federal Requirement.
2. **REGISTRATION:** The original registration copy must be on board and available for review. The document should be sealed in a watertight baggie or another watertight container. Now is the time to check the HIN (Hull Identification Number) on the stern and compare it to be registration. The HIN may be difficult to locate on some older models.
3. **PERSONAL FLOATATION DEVICE:** There MUST be an approved PFD (life jacket) for each person on board. The PFD should be an impact rated of at least 50 MPH. An off shore I PFD is acceptable, but bulky. Discourage a type II as it is NOT impact rated. A type V inflatable is NOT approved. A type IV is NOT required.
4. **VISUAL DISTRESS SIGNALS(VDS):** If they operate on coastal waters, at least three (3) orange day or three (3) red day and night flares are required. Because they do not operate at night, there is no requirement for inland waters, but here's an

opportunity to educate the boater and recommend a signaling mirror designed to be attached to a PFD or the key or a ski flag.

5. **FIRE EXTINGUISHERS:** A Coast Guard approved fire extinguisher is required and it should be in its designated compartment and or strapped down. As the charge can deteriorate with age, recommend a replacement if it's over 8-10 years old. Normally, the bottle has a date code and push test button. Test the bottle by pushing the button down. The button must come up to original position to be certified. The bottle must have the plastic fork "in place" to test the bottle. Explain to the operator how to test the bottle; however, have the person do the testing.



6. **VENTILATION:** PWCs have a natural ventilation system and no blower is required. Always do a "smell check" under seat for fuel vapors before starting the engine. There should be no obstructions on the entrance and exit ports. Mark N/A.
7. **BACKFIRE FLAME CONTROL:** PWCs have a watertight backfire flame arrester that is required to display Coast Guard, Underwriters Laboratories UL label. In most instances, with fuel injection system it is built into the system, but try to determine that there are no modifications. . Please do not make the operator do any disassembly.
8. **SOUND PRODUCING DEVICE:** The Federal Requirements, Nevada, and California are all the same-all vessels MUST have a means of producing a sound audible for at least ½ mile. Utah does NOT require but recommends a whistle. A regular marine whistle with a lanyard to be attached to the operators PFD is acceptable. Discourage a coach's whistle.
9. **NAVIGATION LIGHTS:** PWCs are not intended for nighttime use; therefore, they are not equipped with navigation lights. PWCs only operate between sunrise and sunset. Mark "NA".
10. **POLLUTION PLACARD:** Not Applicable, mark N/A. However, possible pollution should be discussed and remind the operator about draining any dirty or oily bilge water back into the lake.
11. **MARPOL PLACARD:** Not Applicable, mark N/A

12. **MARINE SANITATION DEVICE:** Not Applicable, mark “NA”.
13. **NAVIGATION RULES:** Not Applicable, mark N/A. However, this is an excellent opportunity to discuss courtesy and the basic right of way rules, wake jumping and no wake zones. In addition, provide a copy of the state boating laws.
14. **STATE and LOCAL REQUIREMENTS:** PWC’s, like all vessels must comply with all state and local requirements. This may include: hours of operation, riding restrictions, age requirements, lanyards, insurance, and education. State requirements may vary.
15. **OVERALL VESSEL CONDITION:** The PWC must be well maintained. The battery needs to be strapped down and the positive terminal covered. Make certain that there is NO gasoline in the engine compartment and is reasonably clean. MOST fuel tanks on early models are located there. The pwc must have an electrical cut-off or self-circling device in working order.

**RECOMMENDED AND DISCUSSION ITEMS:**

Suggest: a handheld VHF radio or cell phone (in a waterproof bag), float plan, sunscreen, an anchor, tow rope and a ball cap or a wide brimmed hat. Riders should ALWAYS travel with at least one additional partner. A good idea is also to remind them about the safety and exclusion zones around dams, ships, airports, etc

Believe it or not, PWC owners are very receptive to a VSC! Remember, the VSC is a one-on-one education with the boater, PLEASE don’t lecture or hold them up unnecessarily. If there is ever any question about performing a VSC on a PWC, please don’t hesitate to contact me at: [dso-vel1n@att.net](mailto:dso-vel1n@att.net) or (209) 747-6002

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