

Subject: Liferafts, Regular Servicing and Retrofitting to new Requirements

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In order to ensure that liferafts forming part of the lifesaving equipment of all vessels are regularly maintained, the regulations require annual inspections by a service depot accredited by the manufacturer. This was further highlighted in Ship Safety Bulletin 11/98.

This Bulletin is for owners of small vessels that are uninspected or on a statutory inspection cycle longer than one year. Many occurrences involving small vessels have shown that liferafts, when fitted, are not always serviced on a mandatory basis. Liferafts are the last line of defense in an emergency, therefore, they have a vital role in the survival capability of a ship's crew. The need for a vessel's liferafts to be in optimum condition to carry out this function is without question. Owners, operators and crews are hereby reminded that liferafts must be maintained and serviced on a regular basis as required by the regulations, manufacturers instructions and/or departmental policy on seasonal type operations. This also applies to associated equipment such as hydrostatic release units, launching appliances, pyrotechnics and immersion suits or marine anti-exposure suits where carried.

This bulletin also draws attention to those vessels that may be fitted with an older model of non-SOLAS approved liferaft, generally in the 4 to 6 person capacity range. Such liferafts may be nearing the end of their useful and safe life. Owners and operators should consider replacement at the earliest opportunity if in doubt as to the condition of such older liferafts.

Another important consideration is the improvement in liferaft design over time. Many older style liferafts do not have larger water pockets fitted, thereby, making them more prone to capsizing. Should replacement of such rafts with modern equipment not be feasible, manufacturers and depots may be able to retrofit larger or additional water pockets. Depending on the condition of the liferaft material, it may be possible to do this at considerably less cost than total raft replacement. It is strongly recommended that those owners concerned with the stability of their rafts utilize this option for improved safety.

Keywords:

1. Retrofit of water pockets
2. Inflatable Liferafts
3. Regular Servicing

Questions concerning this bulletin should be addressed to:

AMSEB Transport Canada
Jan Zwaan Marine Safety
613-991-3143 Tower C, Place de Ville
11 th Floor, 330 Sparks Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0N8