

Action Alert

Michigan Charter Boat Association 03/01/2008
<http://www.micharterboats.com/>
Analysis by Jim Fenner



Documentation and PML Action Alert!

Early last summer the Ludington USCG Chief contacted the LACA by email saying that he had received orders to begin boarding charterboats at random and conduct safety inspections. Following two meetings at LACA's request we were given a list of items that would be checked during these boardings. The list included a Certificate of Documentation for all charterboats (AKA: UPV's) greater than 5 net tons (about 25') and USCG approved PML's (personal marker lights) for each PFD.

After much research and many conversations between the Association and the USCG, it is now clear that both documentation and Personal Marker Lights are required by the USCG on all UPV's carrying 6 passengers or less on navigable waters.

Beginning in the spring of '08, the USCG will begin random boardings of MDNR inspected charterboats, with a safety check list which requires both documentation and PML's. Every Charterboat will need to have on their boat a Certificate of Documentation (COD) with a "Coastwise" endorsement.

If you are already documented, check to see that your endorsement includes Coastwise. If so you are all set. You will just need to take care to have your COD with you on your boat at all times.

If you are documented but your endorsement(s) do not include "Coastwise" you will need to apply for a change stating "Coastwise". A COD stating "Recreation" is not sufficient. (You may have multiple endorsements, including "Recreational, Coastwise, and/or "Registry", but you must have "Coastwise" along with any others.)

If your boat is not documented, you need to get documented or at least begin to attempt to be documented before the 2009 season. The Coast Guard has advised us that if you can prove that you are in the process of obtaining documentation, by showing copies of your application and or any correspondence that you may have had with the National Vessel Document Center (NVDC), they will be willing to accept that in the short term. Be sure to keep copies of all applications, documents, or correspondence you may have created in your efforts to become documented.

Information regarding all the documentation requirements, rules and applications may be found at the National Vessel Document Center (NVDC) website which can be easily accessed at: <http://homeport.uscg.mil/>. The instruction for filling out the forms are also available at the website. You will be required to submit a "Fact of Build" document which has to be acquired from the company that built your boat to document your vessel. If the company that built your boat is no longer in business, you may have difficulty acquiring documentation. There may be fees involved for each of these procedures.

In addition to acquiring a "Coastwise" endorsement you will need to check off on the second page; a Primary Service of "Passengers (6 or fewer)". Note: The "Primary Service" notation does not appear on the COD, but is part of the vessels file at the NVDC. If you are currently documented, you may wish to call the NVDC and see if you have the Primary Service designation "Passengers(6 or fewer)". If not, you can have it added by phone: no charge.

There are companies that specialize in filing documentation applications for a fee. If your situation is complicated it may be the best method of obtaining your COD. Several companies that provide this service can be found on the internet. This service can be very expensive.

The bottom line: The USCG is now requiring all UPV's to be documented, and will be checking on this next season. If you are not documented you need to get it done before the season begins. Do it now, and make sure you are prepared!!

What to do if you are not currently documented:

First, if your vessel was built by a company that is still in business, contact them with your hull identification number (HIN). This number is stamped into your hull on the outside at the upper right corner.

Depending on the company you may be asked for additional vessel and/or owner information. In some cases there maybe a fee for the "Fact of Build" document.

If, for example, your vessel is a Tiara, call 616-392-7163, ask for Stephanie Smith. She will get it out to you promptly. Tiara does not charge for this service. Other companies offer similar quick service.

If you own an older vessel and the company that build it is out of business or has gone through multiple changes in ownership you may have trouble getting your "Fact of Build" document.

We have learned that each of these companies has different rules and requirements, and in some cases costs, to provide the "Build Certificate" that you will need to get your COD. You may be able to find the information you need to locate the records for your vessel by using the following website: http://www.uscgboating.org/recalls/mic_database.htm

1. Enter your vessel brand name in the middle line - Company:
(**Note:** Spelling of the name is crucial. If nothing appears, try different spelling versions).
2. This may return from one to several choices. At the left of each choice is a three letter clickable link to more complete information. You may need to try more than one of them to find the correct information for your vessel.
3. You will be lead to addresses and phone #'s that hopefully will lead you to the person or place where your vessel's "build" records are kept. Call them and find what information and steps are required to get a "Build Certificate" for your particular boat.
4. Find out if there is a cost for this service. Then proceed to acquire that document so you can apply for your COD.

Information related to some of the required sources for some vessels:

- **Marinette:** John Atwell. 517-230-4326. atwell06@comcast.net no charge.
- **Sea Rays (Older):** Helen Gilbert at BBG 865-582-2200 Information required. -\$15.
- **Chris Craft:** Robert G. Kallotte, 4962 Cedar Oak Way Sarasota FL 34233 phone: 941-929-7555 Will need to send boat info. Cost \$100.
- **Cherokee Boats:** Richard Stehle 14977 9 Mile Rd. Kaleva, MI 49645 231-362-3864

It is clear from these examples that it will vary widely from company to company.

A quick survey of the MCBA website indicated that there are vessels in service on Lake Michigan built by at least 29 different builders. About half of these companies have re-organized or are out of business. Finding the "Fact of Build" document information for your particular boat may be difficult.

CDR Reinemann of USCG Milwaukee has offered to help Captains who have made serious efforts to locate information for their vessels without success and can be contacted by email at: <mailto:Richard.J.Reinemann@uscg.mil> Please do not contact him until you have exhausted all other avenues!

If all else fails there is a Marad waiver process that costs \$500, with no guarantee of success. If you believe you need to go this route contact CDR Reinemann.

Once you have acquired your "FOB" apply right away to the NVDC for your COD. You will need to download [CG 1258](#). It will cost \$162 (non-refundable). Get it right the first time.

- Use your most permanent address: city and state as your "home port", since changing it ever requires a new application.
- You will also have to apply your vessel name on both sides of the bow in letters at least 4" high, and attach your documentation number to your hull inside the boat (on a stringer, etc) in 3" high letters/numbers.
- Once documented you will still need to be registered in your state and display your state decal, but you may remove your "MC" numbers.
- Once documented you will have to renew your documentation each year (no cost). The NVDC will send you a renewal letter each winter.

If you let your documentation lapse you may be subject to a substantial Federal penalty.

Personal Marker Lights: (AKA: PML's)

In addition to requiring all UPV's to be documented, the USCG is requiring all UPV's to be equipped with USCG approved PML's for each PFD aboard your vessel. These lights attach to the upper portion of a pfd and provide light when activated to aide in locating during low light or darkness.



There are many USCG approved PML's. The simplest and least expensive is the Orion Cyalume PML.

Personnel Marker Light Orion / Cyalume

These light have a expiration date of 2 - 3 years, and cost from \$6 - \$10 depending on your source. They are not refillable when expired. They can be found in most major marine catalogs, and are available through many websites.



A second low cost approved light is the ACR "C" light which uses two AA batteries. These lights may be powered by alkaline batteries with a life of 4 or 5 years, or even the new lithium AA batteries with a life of 10 years or more. The "C" lights are also available in many marine catalogs/stores and on many websites. With out batteries, these lights also cost from \$6 - \$8 up to \$12 - \$15 each, again depending on the source.

Many additional USCG approved lights are available at greater cost. Whatever PML you choose, be sure it is marked USCG approved. If it is battery powered, be sure to have "in date" batteries installed, and check to see that the lights actually light when activated.