



Marine Safety Information Bulletin

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Ninth Coast Guard District
Inspections and Investigations Branch
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Uninspected Passenger Vessel Documentation Enforcement

Vessel documentation is a national form of registration that applies only to vessels that measure at least 5 net tons. Such a vessel, if engaged in the fisheries or coastwise trade on U.S. navigable waters, is required under the U.S. documentation law to hold a Certificate of Documentation (COD) bearing a valid endorsement appropriate for the activity in which engaged. This includes uninspected passenger vessels, such as those that typically engage in fishing charters. For more details on documentation, refer to the National Vessel Documentation Center's website at www.uscg.mil/nvdc.

Net tonnage is a volumetric measure established under the U.S. tonnage measurement law, and should not be confused with weight. This law provides for simplified measurement of smaller commercial and recreational vessels, which is effectively a "no cost", owner self-certification process. However, any vessel owner can opt for measurement under one of the older U.S. measurement systems that can yield lower tonnages, but requires calculations and an onboard survey by an authorized measurement organization at the owner's expense. Most vessels more than 25 feet in length will measure 5 net tons or more if an owner uses the "no cost", self-certification simplified system. For more details on tonnage measurement, refer to publication *Tonnage Guide 1*, which is available on the Coast Guard Marine Safety Center's website at www.uscg.mil/hq/msc/tonnage/pubs.asp.

The vessel owner is responsible for complying with documentation and tonnage measurement laws. When enforcing these laws the Coast Guard takes into consideration many factors, which include the risk of non-compliance to marine safety, security and environmental protection. Whether or not a vessel is documented does not impact passenger or vessel safety.

Currently, the Coast Guard is reviewing its policy regarding the enforcement of vessel documentation. Pending completion of this review, **Ninth District units will accept a valid state registration or a valid COD**, when performing routine checks of uninspected passenger vessels/fishing charters. If future legislative, regulatory, or policy changes necessitate an adjustment to this enforcement posture, the Ninth District will provide ample notice of the changes and an appropriate phase-in period to facilitate timely compliance.

Questions concerning this MSIB may be directed to Mr. Mark Bobal, Ninth Coast Guard District Passenger Vessel Safety Specialist. His contact information is provided above.

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