



# SHIP SAFETY BULLETIN

Bulletin No.: 09/2026  
ISSN No.: 3111-0975  
Date: 2026-06-02  
Y - M - D

We issue Ship Safety Bulletins for the marine community. Visit our website at [www.tc.gc.ca/ssb-bsn](http://www.tc.gc.ca/ssb-bsn) to view existing bulletins and to sign up to receive e-mail notices of new ones.



**Subject: Safety measures concerning life-saving appliances**

This bulletin replaces [SSB No: 05/2019](#), [11/2000](#) and [16/1985](#)

## Scope

This bulletin applies to **all** Canadian vessels.

## Purpose

This bulletin reminds the marine community of some well-established safe practices for life-saving appliances. The recommendations and information provided in this bulletin are complementary to the applicable legal obligations.

## Safety reminders

Transport Canada would like to remind the marine community of considerations relating to:

- the compatibility of retrofitted and/or replaced components of life-saving appliances.
- the need to check your life-saving equipment visually on an ongoing basis and ensure it is maintained in good condition.
- the sizing of personal life-saving equipment; and
- the storage location and condition of life-saving appliances.

## Immersion suits

Occurrences where immersion suit zippers have not operated properly in an emergency situation continue to be reported. See the [Marine transportation safety investigation report M21P0030](#) concerning the sinking of the Tug *Ingenika* and barge *Miller 204*, where failure to routinely maintain the zippers of the vessel's immersion suits may have likely prevented their proper donning and been a factor contributing to the loss of life.

### Keywords:

1. Lifejacket
2. PFD
3. Inflatable
4. Survival craft
5. Immersion suits
6. Hydrostatic release units

### Questions concerning this Bulletin should be addressed to:

AMSDS  
Transport Canada  
Marine Safety and Security  
Tower C, Place de Ville  
330 Sparks Street, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0N8

Contact us at: [marinesafety-securitemaritime@tc.gc.ca](mailto:marinesafety-securitemaritime@tc.gc.ca) or 1-855-859-3123 (Toll Free).



Occurrences where crew members were not able to fully don their immersion suits before entering the water, either due to insufficient time or knowledge on how to properly don them, also continue to be reported. See both [Marine Investigation Report M04W0034](#) and [Marine transportation safety investigation report M23C0257](#) for examples where additional training and additional practice on quickly donning immersion suits prior to an emergency could have potentially prevented the loss of life.

Boat and fire drills afford an opportunity for crew to practice donning their immersion suits to ensure that they are of an appropriate size and that the zippers are properly lubricated. To confirm correct fit, an immersion suit that is too large will not seal properly around the face, and a suit that is too small may not close correctly at the chin. In each case, water can leak into the suit, which jeopardizes its primary purpose of keeping a person dry and warm when in the water.

Further, it is important that the suits be inspected for any obvious sign of deterioration or damage, which may affect the integrity of the immersion suit. Visually inspect immersion suits after every boat drill to confirm they are in a good condition:

- Pay close attention to glued seams in areas such as boots, gloves, hoods and along the zipper and suit body;
- Check for separation of glued materials, lifting of tape covering seams and other potential failures of the gluing compounds;
- Verify there are no rips or punctures in the suit body;
- Ensure that zippers are lubricated with a manufacturer approved product and can be fully opened and closed without binding; and
- Check the personal locator light to ensure the battery has not exceeded the expiry date.

Immersion suit repairs must be conducted by:

- the manufacturer;
- an agent authorized by the manufacturer; or
- where an immersion suit manufacturer is no longer in business, another manufacturer able to undertake necessary repairs in accordance with acceptable guidelines such as those set out in the IMO publication MSC/Circ.1114 Guidelines for Periodic Testing of Immersion suit and Anti-exposure Suit Seams and Closures.

## **Lifejackets**

Visually inspect all lifejackets after every boat drill. Confirm that humidity in the storage location has not accidentally activated the lights. Remember that these lights work once only. Ensure that the expiry date of the personal locator light has not been exceeded. Also inspect lifejacket straps for wear and tear by pulling firmly on the straps.

Every crew member who is assigned an individual lifejacket must try it on to confirm that it is of an appropriate size. Tie straps at the neck must fit snugly under the chin, not over the chin or close to the mouth. Not every model of lifejacket fits everyone properly.

For additional information related to the use, inspection and maintenance of inflatable lifejackets and PFDs, see [SSB No: 12/2019](#).

### **Survival craft and rescue boats**

Ensure components of survival craft and launching appliances that have been retrofitted or replaced work as designed by the manufacturer. All components must comply with any requirements applicable to them as specified in the type approval certification. They must also be compatible, per any additional manufacturer's recommendations.

Pay special attention if a vessel has upgraded survival craft but kept existing launching appliances, and vice versa. Vessel owners, operators and equipment suppliers are asked to verify that all components of survival craft release mechanisms, and more specifically release hooks and lifting rings, meet design requirements. Transport Canada or the delegated Recognized Organization must be informed of any such modifications.

For more information, read [Marine Safety Advisory Letter no. 04/18](#) - Failure of lifeboat release hook, published by the Transportation Safety Board.

Ensure crew are trained in how to operate release mechanisms safely on board the vessel. Include instructions for how to do this in the vessel's safety procedures. This is required under paragraph 106(1)(b) of the *Canada Shipping Act, 2001*.

### **Hydrostatic release units (HRU)**

The HRU is a component of the inflatable survival equipment to which it is fitted and must be inspected and serviced as required for such equipment. At every boat drill, inspect the HRU installed on each life raft. Check that they appropriately secure the life rafts to the vessel, per the manufacturer's instructions.

Disposable units marked with an expiry date must be replaced on or before the date that is indicated.

The [Life Saving Equipment Regulations](#) (LSER) and the [Vessel Construction and Equipment Regulations](#) (VCER) require annual servicing for inflatable survival craft, including an associated hydrostatic release unit. In Some cases, service intervals could be longer provided certain conditions are met, refer to the LSER and VCER for additional details.

Inspection and maintenance of HRU's should include:

- Verification of correct installation to ensure they will reliably function when needed, if in doubt, correct installation information should be obtained from the unit's manufacturer;
- A record of the servicing should be kept on board the ship; and
- An operation and instruction manual should be kept on board the ship and all mariners should make themselves familiar with the HRU's function.

## **Storage locations of life-saving equipment**

Regularly ensure that:

- storage locations continue to protect the appliances stored inside them from the elements;
- storage locations are kept clean and are clearly identified;
- storage locations are properly marked as required; and
- access to the storage locations is always unobstructed, regardless of the weather or the vessel's operation.

## **Maintenance and servicing requirements**

The *[Small Vessel Regulations](#)* (SVR), and the *[Fishing Vessel Safety Regulations](#)* (FVSR) require life-saving equipment to be maintained according to the manufacturer's instructions or recommendations (maintenance procedures). Vessels subject to the LSER and the VCER need to have these maintenance procedures incorporated into their maintenance manuals. Where a vessel is required to have a safety management system in accordance with the *[Marine Safety Management System Regulations](#)*, the maintenance procedures are to be included in its safety management system.

In addition to the safe practices highlighted in this bulletin, all life-saving appliances must be maintained periodically in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and as prescribed by various regulations.

The servicing of inflatable life-saving equipment on Safety Convention vessels and vessels 24 metres or more in length must be done by an authorized service provider. A list of authorized service providers may be found at: [List of recognized organizations' authorized service providers and service technicians for life saving appliances](#).