



MCA Guidance for Pleasure Vessels

A brief guide to regulation
and safe practice

Around three million people enjoy going afloat in the UK every year. Although pleasure boating in the UK is not heavily regulated, there is still some legislation that must be followed. This leaflet provides a handy guide to the regulations that apply to pleasure vessels and where to find out more about them. It also gives some useful general safety advice.

This leaflet is for owners and crew of small pleasure vessels including sailing boats, windsurfers, motorboats, ski boats, powerboats, sports boats, dive boats, personal watercraft, canoes, kayaks and non powered craft. For the purposes of this leaflet, all of these are referred to as 'pleasure vessels'.

For more information visit the MCA Pleasure Vessel Information Pack (see page 9).

If your boat carries more than 12 people (in addition to the crew) please contact your local MCA marine office for advice. Your boat will be considered as a 'passenger ship' and will be subject to more stringent regulations.

Safety advice for going afloat:

- Contact the national governing body for your activity and get trained by the experts.
- Wear a lifejacket or buoyancy aid.
- Check the tides and weather forecast.
- Carry a communications device and detection aids (for example VHF radio and EPIRB). Make sure that you know how to use them and who to call in an emergency.
- Avoid alcohol – don't drink and drown.

Other advice:

- Be courteous to other water users and respect their space.
- Tell someone where you're going and when you expect to return. Ask them to call the Coastguard if you are not back soon after you're expected.
- Register with our voluntary safety identification scheme, CG66. See page 8 for more information.

Legislation applicable to pleasure vessels

Prevention of Collision Regulations

All pleasure vessels must comply with the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea.

The International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea can be found in Merchant Shipping Notice (MSN) 1781 (M+F) as amended. Visit www.mcga.gov.uk/c4mca/colregs

Safety of Navigation (SOLAS Chapter V)

While most of the SOLAS Convention only applies to large commercial ships, parts of Chapter V deal with safety of navigation for **all pleasure vessels**.

The requirements are that:

- any voyage is properly planned prior to being undertaken (Regulation V/34);
- pleasure vessels must, as far as practicable, be fitted with a radar reflector (Regulation V/19);
- an illustrated table of lifesaving signals must be carried on board where possible (Regulation V/29);
- the skipper of a pleasure vessel must report any dangers to navigation and respond to distress messages. This can be done by contacting the Coastguard and reporting directly to them (Regulations V/31, V/32 and V/33);
- distress signals must not be misused (Regulation V/35).

The MCA produces a SOLAS V leaflet and a lifesaving signals leaflet. See page 9 for details.



Safety Equipment

Pleasure vessels of 13.7 metres in length or over are obliged to comply with the Merchant Shipping (Life-Saving Appliances for ships other than ships of Class III to VI (A)) Regulations 1999 and the Merchant Shipping (Fire Protection: Small Ships) Regulations 1998. These vessels are classified as being Class XII in these Regulations. Please see the MCA Pleasure Vessel Information Pack (see page 9) for more details on the requirements for these vessels

Inland Waterways

When using your pleasure vessel on inland waters there may be local navigational requirements and you should check with the navigation authority to find out what they are. You can get information about navigation authorities from the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities (AINA) (www.aina.org.uk)

Some larger navigation authorities will require your vessel to be registered with a navigation licence if it is kept or used on their waterways. Your vessel may also need to be inspected in accordance with the Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) (www.boatsafetyscheme.com)

Harbours Acts – Powers of Harbour Masters

The Harbours Acts of 1946 and 1996 and the Fisheries Centre Harbours Act 1980 give harbour masters the power to create bye-laws within the limits of their port areas. Whilst the majority of shipping within such ports is commercial, **all pleasure vessels** need to comply with relevant bye-laws. Details of these are available from the harbour masters' offices.

Prevention of Pollution (MARPOL)

There are various laws governing the dumping of waste at sea, including oil and garbage. We therefore **strongly recommend** that you do not dump waste into the sea, but retain it on board. You can then dispose of it in reception facilities ashore, to avoid breaking these regulations.

Alcohol

The sea and alcohol do not mix. We recommend that you avoid drinking alcohol whilst afloat.

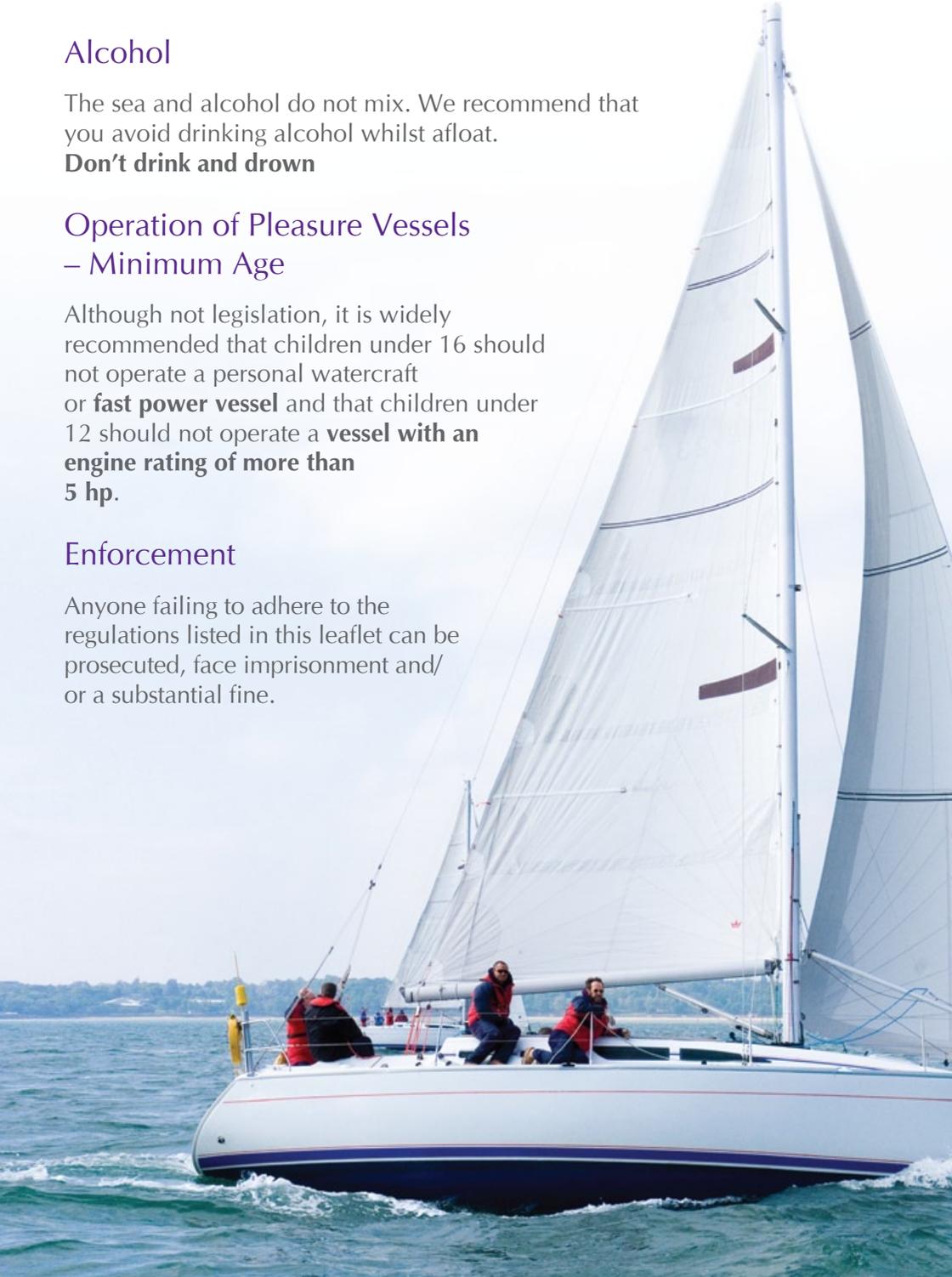
Don't drink and drown

Operation of Pleasure Vessels – Minimum Age

Although not legislation, it is widely recommended that children under 16 should not operate a personal watercraft or **fast power vessel** and that children under 12 should not operate a **vessel with an engine rating of more than 5 hp**.

Enforcement

Anyone failing to adhere to the regulations listed in this leaflet can be prosecuted, face imprisonment and/or a substantial fine.



Lifejackets and buoyancy aids

Whilst there are no laws in the UK requiring buoyancy aids or lifejackets to be worn, they have been proven to save lives; so we recommend that you wear one. Make sure that you select and wear the correct type for your particular recreational activity.



Buoyancy aids

Buoyancy aids are simple foam filled waistcoats that provide limited buoyancy when immersed in the water. You should wear one when you go **canoeing, kayaking, dinghy sailing, windsurfing, or use a personal watercraft**. A buoyancy aid, however, will not have enough buoyancy to help people who cannot help themselves. You should take this into consideration when selecting a personal floatation device.

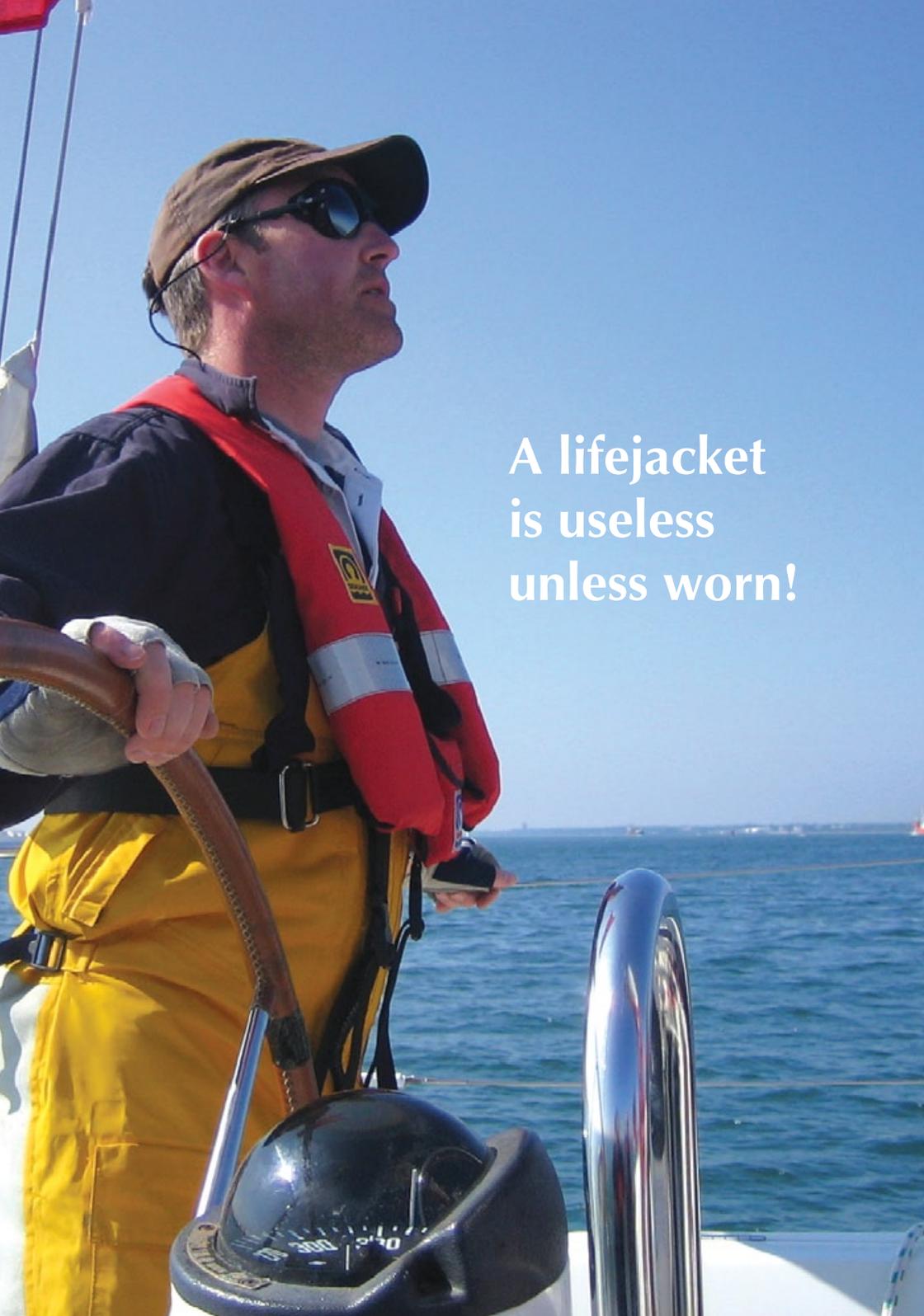
Lifejackets

If you're buying a lifejacket make sure that it's fitted with a whistle and light, retro-reflective tape, a lifting strap, crotch-straps and a spray hood. All of these features will help increase survival times and the likelihood of rescue. Emergency inflation toggles should be clearly visible and accessible.

Lifejackets are intended for general coastal and offshore use in a variety of conditions. Some lifejackets are designed to automatically inflate if you fall into the water and a good lifejacket should provide at least 150 newtons of buoyancy. If you fall into the water, you will begin to gasp and your breathing will become more rapid. This could result in you breathing in water. A good lifejacket will keep your airways clear of the water during this time. You should wear a lifejacket when **sailing or motor boating**.

Look for the 'wheelmark' and 'kite mark' as the primary indicators of a quality product ask for a products newton rating, and always purchase from a reputable source.

Lifejackets and buoyancy aids should be inspected before and after use, and serviced regularly. Many lifejacket manufacturers provide information on correct wear, user checks and service intervals. Further advice is readily available from the MCA (www.mcga.gov.uk/c4mca/lifejackets) RYA (www.rya.org.uk/go/lifejacket) and RNLI (www.rnli.org.uk/wearone).



A lifejacket
is useless
unless worn!

EPIRBS

The primary type of Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) is a 406 MHz beacon.

406 MHz beacons transmit a digital signal for reception by satellites, forming a system that covers most of the world. They have a unique identification code transmitted as part of the distress signal that provides information about the boat carrying the beacon, including the owner's emergency contact details.

Registration of your beacon is mandatory and can be done at the UK 406 MHz Beacon Registry at Falmouth by e-mailing epirb@mcga.gov.uk or phoning 01326 211569. It is also essential that you notify us if you change ownership. See MSN 1816 under publications on the MCA website for more information or visit www.mcga.gov.uk/epirb.

CG66 voluntary safety identification scheme

The CG66 voluntary safety identification scheme is a database of vessel details, available to all our Coastguard co-ordination centres throughout the UK. It can be used to help find you quickly should you need search and rescue action at sea. To join the scheme we will need this information about your vessel:

- its size and colour;
- its radio and navigation equipment;
- the lifesaving equipment it carries;
- your usual area of operation and mooring; and
- an onshore contact whilst you are at sea.

You can join on-line by visiting www.mcga.gov.uk/cg66, or get the forms from your local Coastguard station, MCA marine offices, RNLI boathouses or your local marina or sailing club.

Additional Information

For more information visit the MCA website (www.mcga.gov.uk) and the MCA Pleasure Vessel Information Pack (www.mcga.gov.uk/c4mca/pleasurevessel).

The MCA also produces a number of free leaflets with further detail about regulations for pleasure vessels, safety equipment and navigation.

Maritime Safety Information (MSI) – Leaflet MCA/064

NAVTEX – Leaflet MCA/080

Channel Navigation Information System (CNIS) – Leaflet MCA/013

Automatic Identification System (AIS) – Leaflet MCA/183

Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS V) – Leaflet MCA/098

Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) – Leaflet MCA/103

Emergency Alerting-leaflet MCA/nav/001

Contact mca@ecgroup.co.uk to request copies. Tel: 0845 603 2431



Useful Contacts

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (www.mcga.gov.uk) is the government agency responsible for safer lives, safer ships and cleaner seas.

The RYA (www.rya.org.uk) is the national governing body for sailing, motor boating and windsurfing.

The British Canoe Union (www.bcu.org.uk) is the national governing body for canoeing and kayaking.

The RYA is the national representative body for using PWC, and the **Personal Watercraft Partnership** (www.pwpuk.org), is a committee made up of industry experts whose aim is to expand and support PWC activities.

The RNLI (www.rnli.org.uk) is an independent charity helping to save lives at sea.

In an emergency dial 999 and ask for the coastguard



Further information

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency
Spring Place
105 Commercial Road
Southampton
SO15 1EG

Tel: 02380 329100
Email: infoline@mcga.gov.uk
Website: www.mcga.gov.uk

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