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Improvements to BSS come into effect this April

The modernisation of the Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) will come into effect this April bringing various improvements including new-style requirements from the inland navigation authorities for installations and equipment on privately owned boats.

The Scheme is used by the navigation authorities to help prevent fires, explosions and pollution through a four-yearly mandatory boat examination that checks if the craft meets the requirements. Modernisation aims to make the Scheme more effective by balancing the regulatory, advisory and informative approaches. It will also provide a transparent alignment with other national and EU regulations. In effect this means

- the regulatory approach is strictly focussed on risks to third parties i.e. preventing fires starting and spreading, explosions and pollution;
- over 90 mainly construction specific standards are replaced by just 32 goal-setting requirements, although there will still be around 300 potential checks for examiners to complete;
- new options for complying with the navigation authorities' requirements;
- seven new compliance checks – although minor in nature and affecting a tiny number of boats;
- a greater emphasis on advice and information to avoid pollution and to cover the use of fuels and systems;
- alerting owners to their responsibilities linked to risks to first parties such as more advisory checks for carbon monoxide, fire-escape and electrocution hazards.

A short 'key change' document is available setting out in simple terms the differences between the old Standards and the new requirements. However, the BSS expectations on the way installations and equipment will meet the requirements has changed little. As the document shows, most of the information contained within the BSS Essential Guide remains current.

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In carrying out the checks, examiners have no discretion to accept arrangements that don't match the Scheme's expectations. However, boat owners who have documentary evidence to support a claim of compliance with the general requirements will be welcome to contact the BSS Office with all necessary details for consideration within a fast-track process.

As a part of modernisation, a second edition of the BSS Essential Guide is to be published. This will urge people to meet all industry accepted standards, to install equipment following suppliers' guidelines, to use only equipment designed for the rigours of the marine environment and to carry out routine checks and maintenance as complying with the requirements is binding at anytime the boat is in the water. It will be available on www.boatsafetyscheme.com free of charge or in various formats 'at cost' in the spring.

Licensing and registration conditions for boats that are not privately owned and privately managed are to be reviewed separately by the navigation authorities and this will be heavily influenced by work by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency which is considering safety standards for hire boats and similar classes of craft.

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The key changes document is on the BSS website on current info and other pages