



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Northeast Fisheries Science Center
166 Water Street
Woods Hole, MA 02543-1026

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Northeast Fisheries Observer Program Observers

FROM: Amy S. Van Atten
Branch Chief, FSB 

SUBJECT: Instructions for Completing the Pre Trip Vessel Safety Checklist (PTVSC) and EPIRB Visual Inspection Card (EVIC)

The Pre Trip Vessel Safety Checklist (PTVSC) is meant to increase personal safety awareness, as well as to provide accurate safety information to NEFOP staff and observers regarding individual vessels. Since this data is important to the overall safety of all observers, it will be closely reviewed and compared with data collected on previous trips.

This memo will clarify how we expect the PTVSC to be completed and will introduce the new procedures for completing and issuing an EPIRB Visual Inspection Card (EVIC). The PTVSC is designed to be scanned. The scanning procedure is very sensitive in recognizing numbers and characters, therefore, the PTVSC MUST BE filled out neatly and clearly. There have been significant problems with scanning due to improper completion and markings outside boxes, etc. This leads to data processing delays. Please read and follow these instructions to help make the process more efficient.

Do not make photocopies of the PTVSC. There are specific parameters to the layout of the checklist which must be precise in order for it to be scanned properly. If you need more copies of the PTVSC AIS observers should contact Jack Harrington at (774-200-1502 cell) and EWTS observers should contact Corrin Flora (508-495-2188), or print the form directly from NEFSC Fisheries Sampling Branch website (<http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/femad/fsb/>).

Below is a list of mandatory guidelines for completing the PTVSC:

- DO NOT make any markings or notes outside of the designated areas on the front of the PTVSC. If you have comments, record them in the appropriate box on the back in the comments section.
- ONLY make comments regarding legitimate safety and stability concerns, an explanation as to why a field was left blank or if you had any difficulties collection the required information.
- DO NOT put slashes (/) or dashes (-) between the boxes when recording any of the expiration dates.



- All equipment expiration dates are to be recorded in the MM/YY format (2 digit month and 2 digit year). If uncertain leave blank and provide comments in comment section of PTVSC. Do not use partial dates or numbers.
- If any of the equipment expiration dates are left blank, you **MUST** comment as to why on the back of the PTVSC.
- If the vessel's life raft or EPIRB do not have a hydrostatic release (e.g. "float free"), shade the *YES* box for *EPIRB* or *Life Raft(s)* on the front of the PTVSC and leave the expiration date fields blank. Provide comments on the back of the PTVSC.
- All recorded information should be written clearly and as dark as possible. Completely shade in appropriate boxes.

EPIRB

Methods for verifying the EPIRB hydrostatic release and battery expiration dates:

Visual inspection

- The observer, with the help of captain or crew, visually inspects the EPIRB paying close attention to the expiration dates for the hydrostatic release (good for 2 years) and battery (good for 5 years).
- Shade the *YES* box for *EPIRB* and record the expiration dates in the appropriate boxes on the front of the PTVSC. The observer will complete an EPIRB Visual Inspection Card (EVIC) and issue it to the captain, explaining the use and ask that he retain the card in a convenient location for 90 days.
- Complete the back, bottom section, *Visual Inspection*, on the PTVSC. Since you are required to issue an EVIC if you inspect an EPIRB, *YES* will always be the answer to, *Was an EPIB Visual Inspection Card issued?* Carefully record the card number and date issued.
 - Observers are NOT to remove EPIRB housings or handle EPIRBs. Captain or crew must assist so that observers can visually inspect the EPIRB to record expiration dates.
 - The captain or qualified crew member may also need to unlatch and remove the EPIRB itself from the bracket as the battery expiration date may be located on the back of the unit. Do not confuse this date with the NOAA registration date (Figure 2).

A previously issued EPIRB Visual Inspection Card (EVIC)

- In this case, the observer would not record the expiration dates on the front of the PTVSC, but would shade the *YES* box for *EPIRB*. The observer will record the EVIC number and the date the card was issued in the *EPIRB Visual Inspection Card* boxes on the back of the PTVSC. Only valid for 90 days after issuance.

Approved USCG documentation

- Acceptable documentation would be the USCG Safety Examiners form with the EPIRB hydrostatic release and battery expiration dates or a USCG sticker with those dates, provided the hydrostatic release and battery has not expired and the examination was completed within the last 90 days.

- If the above criteria are met then please shade the *YES* box for *EPIRB* and record hydrostatic release and battery expiration dates on the front of the PTVSC. Complete the appropriate section on the back of the PTVSC and provide comments in comment section. Comments should include what type of USCG documentation was used, who issued and when.
- If the examination form does not include those dates, or if the items have expired or the safety exam is older than 90 days, the observer is required to either visually inspect the EPIRB and complete an EVIC, or issue an SDR and not deploy.

There are some older models of a Category I EPIRB that are attached with a mounting bracket (Figure 3) in which the hydrostatic release is located inside the bracket. For that situation only:

- Paperwork noting the hydrostatic release expiration date will suffice. Paperwork could include: USCG documentation, a dated receipt showing that the hydrostatic release was purchased within the last 2 years, sticker placed by manufacturer or installer with legible expiration date, or an EVIC. If you use an EVIC, dated receipt, or **sticker** to verify hydrostatic release expiration date please shade the *YES* box for *EPIRB* on the front of the PTVSC, leave hydrostatic release expiration date blank and complete the appropriate section on the back of the PTVSC (*EPIRB Visual Inspection Card* or *Approved USCG documentation*). Shade *Approved USCG documentation* box if a **sticker** is used as proof that hydro is current. Please provide comments in comment section. If there is no paperwork (EVIC, approved USCG documentation issued within the last 90 days, sticker, or dated receipt indicating that the hydrostatic release is less than 2 years old) then the mounting bracket will need to be removed by the captain or a qualified crew member so that the observer can visually inspect the hydrostatic release. If the observer does visually inspect the EPIRB hydrostatic release, they will complete, and issue, an EVIC.

EPIRBs that are considered a Category II (Figure 4) are manually released and activated. They do not have a hydrostatic release. Category II EPIRBs are only approved for vessels less than 36' that have manufacturer installed buoyancy. When these types of EPIRBs are encountered please shade in *YES* box for *EPIRB* and leave expiration dates blank on the front of the PTVSC. Provide comments on the back of the PTVSC.

If you are unable to visually inspect, and if other documentation is absent, the observer will complete a Safety Deficiency Report (SDR) (Refusal report, OLE letter and PTVSC) and not deploy.

LIFE RAFT

Methods for verifying the life raft service and hydrostatic release expiration dates:

- Life raft service and hydrostatic release expiration dates should be relatively easy to obtain and do not require the assistance of the captain or crew. The raft hydrostatic release is good for two years and the raft service is good for 1 year (brand new rafts are good for 2 years). The life raft service date is usually a sticker placed by the facility that last performed the inspection.

- Life rafts need to be checked before every trip. The **ONLY** exception is if it is truly unsafe to get on top of the house. In this case, you can use the USCG Safety Examiners form (if issued within the last year) that documents the raft service and hydrostatic release expiration dates as proof that the raft is good. Record the dates on the front of the PTVSC from the USCG Safety Examiners form and comment on the back.
- Life rafts that are considered “float free” will have a weak link, indicated by a red line or thin wire (Figure 5 & 6), instead of a hydrostatic release. The weak link will be securely attached to the deck or cradle on one end and to the painter on the other end. The weak link has an expiration date; however, the attached tag with the expiration date is not very rugged and often falls off.
 - When these “float free” life rafts are encountered please shade in *YES* box for *Life Raft(s)* and leave expiration dates blank. Provide comments.
- There are some life rafts on the market that are “hard shell”, “egg” or “pod” shaped (Figure 7). One manufacturer is Ovatek. These rafts have a hydrostatic release but do not require an annual service inspection or repacking.
 - If you encounter one of these life rafts, record the hydrostatic release date, leave the service expiration date blank and make a comment on the back of the PTVSC.

Issuing an EPIRB Visual Inspection Card (EVIC):

- The purpose of the EVIC is to provide observers with additional options and flexibility when inspecting EPIRBs and to reduce the burden placed on the fishermen while improving the overall safety for observers.
- To issue a card, an observer **MUST** visually inspect the EPIRB, accurately recording the hydrostatic release and battery expiration dates on the front of the PTVSC. The observer shall not handle the EPIRB but rather ask the captain for assistance to remove housing or to remove EPIRB from mounting bracket.
- The observer will record the EPIRB hydrostatic release and battery expiration dates and shade the *YES* box for *EPIRB* on the front of the PTVSC and the relevant fields for the *EPIRB Visual Inspection card* on the back of the PTVSC.
- The observer will explain the purpose of the card to the captain. The observer will inform the captain that the card is good for 90 days and recommend that the captain keep the card in an accessible area to show to future observers.
- An observer has the option to visit a vessel the day before departing on a trip to complete the PTVSC and issue EPIRB Visual Inspection card. Those data will be included with the trip data and should be completed per above instructions.
- When completing the EVIC please note that there are two sections. The first (top) section is to be used if either the hydrostatic release or battery will **NOT** expire over the next 90 days. The lower section is to be completed if one, or both, of those items **WILL** expire over the next 90 days. Only complete one of those sections.

Two other scenarios when an EVIC might be issued:

- The current EVIC is close to expiring, but will not during the trip. The observer can decide to use the current EVIC for completing the PTVSC (per above instructions) before deploying. Once the vessel returns to port, and when things might be less hectic and visibility might be improved, the observer can visually inspect and verify the EPIRB hydrostatic release and battery expiration dates to issue a new EVIC.
 - The observer would also complete a separate (additional) PTVSC by shading the *EPIRB YES* box, carefully recording the EPIRB expiration dates on the front of the PTVSC, filling in ONLY the following fields: *Vessel Name, Observer ID (instead of trip ID) and Hull Number* and completing the appropriate section on the back of the PTVSC.
 - We expect observers to be considerate of future observers by issuing a new EVIC before the old one expires.
- If the observer is at the docks doing dock rounds or arranging future trips, and wanted to be proactive, he/she may complete and issue an EVIC to vessels that might be in port doing maintenance or repairs. This would allow the inspection to be completed without being rushed in the early morning.
 - The observer would complete a PTVSC by shading the *EPIRB YES* box, carefully recording the EPIRB expiration dates on the front of the PTVSC, filling in ONLY the following fields: *Vessel Name, Observer ID (instead of trip ID) and Hull Number* and completing the appropriate section on the back of the PTVSC.
 - These forms can be mailed separately or with the observer's next trip. This procedure can also be used by ACs and NEFOP staff.

The observer always has the right to ask the captain to allow visual inspection of the EPIRB, regardless of what documentation is available. Observers must not handle EPIRBs to obtain dates. This must be done by the captain or assigned crew member.

Observers always have the right to refuse deployment on any vessel for safety concerns. If this occurs because of issues not covered on the PTVSC, the observer will contact their AC, fully document the situation in their field diary and mail it in with their next trip.

For your safety, and the safety of others, it is imperative that you record the correct expiration dates for safety equipment.

Safety decal and equipment expiration dates will be closely monitored in order to maintain consistent and accurate data for observed vessels. If you are unable to obtain expiration dates leave the appropriate fields blank and provide complete comments. Only record data that you are sure are accurate. If there is sufficient uncertainty, the observer is advised to not deploy and immediately contact their AC.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Mike Tork at 508-495-2339, Mike.Tork@noaa.gov or Lauren Marcinkiewicz at 508-495-2212, Lauren.Marcinkiewicz@noaa.gov.

Thank you



Figure 1. A Category I EPIRB enclosed in a housing unit.

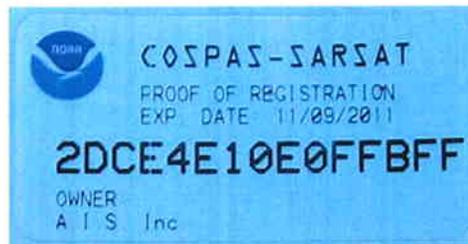


Figure 2. NOAA EPIRB registration sticker.



Figure 3. Examples of a Category I EPIRB with mounting bracket. The hydrostatic release is located behind bracket.



Figure 4. A Category II EPIRB, no hydrostatic release.



Figure 5. A wire version of a weak link on a float free life raft.



Figure 6. Float free life raft and cradle.



Figure 7. A hard shell, “egg” shaped fiberglass life raft. Does not required annual servicing or repacking.