



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Northeast Fisheries Science Center
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MEMORANDUM FOR: Northeast Fisheries Observer Program Observers

FROM: Amy S. Van Atten
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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 Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP) staff and observers/monitors 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 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 contact your Program Manager or Mike Tork (508) 495-2339 or Lauren Carroll (508) 495-2212. You can also print a copy 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 collecting 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 the life raft or EPIRB on the vessel 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/monitor, 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/she retain the card for 90 days.
- Complete the back, bottom section of the PTVSC by shading the *Visual Inspection* box. Carefully record the EVIC number and date issued.
 - Observers/monitors are NOT to remove EPIRB housings or handle EPIRBs. The captain or a qualified crew member must assist so that observers/monitors 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/monitor would NOT record the expiration dates on the front of the PTVSC, but would shade the *YES* box for *EPIRB*. The observer/monitor will record the EVIC number and the date the card was issued in the appropriate boxes on the back of the PTVSC. *Shade the EPIRB Visual Inspection Card (EVIC)* on the back of the PTVSC. The EVIC is 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 that the hydrostatic release or 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 the hydrostatic release and battery expiration dates on the front of the PTVSC.

Shade the *Approved USCG documentation* box on the back of the PTVSC and provide comments in the comment section.

- 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/monitor is required to either visually inspect the EPIRB and complete an EVIC, or issue a Safety Deficiency Report (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 receipt showing that the hydrostatic release was purchased within the last 2 years, a sticker placed by the manufacturer or installer with a 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 or dated receipt is used as proof that the hydro is current. Please provide comments in the comment section. If there is no paperwork (EVIC, approved USCG documentation 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/monitor can visually inspect the hydrostatic release. If the observer/monitor 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 the *YES* box for *EPIRB* and leave the hydrostatic release expiration date blank on the front of the PTVSC. Provide comments on the back of the PTVSC.

An observer/monitor is not to deploy on a vessel in a situation when an EPIRB is borrowed from another vessel in order to meet the expiration date requirements. The borrowed EPIRB will not be registered to the correct vessel and rescue efforts may potentially be delayed.

If you are unable to visually inspect the EPIRB, and if documentation with the appropriate expiration dates is absent, the observer will complete a Safety Deficiency Report (SDR) and not deploy.

LIFE RAFT

- 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 Examination 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 Examination form and comment on the back. If there is no documentation and you are unable to get on top of the house to inspect the raft because of safety concerns, do not deploy and do not issue an SDR. Provide comments on your PTVSC and then contact your Area Coordinator or Program Manager immediately.
- Life rafts that are considered “float free” will have a weak link, indicated by a red line or thin wire (Figure 5), 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 the *YES* box for *Life Raft(s)* and leave hydrostatic release expiration date blank. Provide comments on the back of the PTVSC.
- 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/monitors 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/monitor **MUST** visually inspect the EPIRB and accurately record the hydrostatic release and battery expiration dates on the front of the PTVSC. The observer/monitor shall not handle the EPIRB but rather ask the captain for assistance to remove housing or to remove EPIRB from mounting bracket.
- Shade the *YES* box for *EPIRB* the on the front of the PTVSC, shade the *Visual inspection* box on the back of the PTVSC and record the *EVIC card number* and *Date issued* on the back of the PTVSC.
- 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. Do NOT record any dates in this top portion. 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.

- Do NOT record expiration dates for any other pieces of safety equipment on the EVIC.
- The observer/monitor will explain the purpose of the card to the captain. The observer/monitor 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/monitor has the option to visit a vessel the day before departing on a trip to complete the PTVSC and issue an EVIC. That data will be included with the trip data and should be completed per above instructions.

Two other scenarios when an EVIC might be used:

- The current EVIC is close to expiring, but will not during the trip. The observer/monitor 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/monitor must visually inspect and verify the EPIRB hydrostatic release and battery expiration dates to issue a new EVIC.
 - The observer/monitor would also complete a separate 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/Monitor ID (instead of Trip ID)* and *Hull Number* and completing the appropriate section on the back of the PTVSC.
 - We expect observers/monitors to be considerate of future observers/monitors by issuing a new EVIC before the old one expires.
- If the observer/monitor is at the dock 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/monitor would also complete a separate 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/Monitor 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/monitor's next trip.
This procedure can also be used by Area Coordinators, Program Managers and NEFOP staff.

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

Observers/monitors 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/monitor will contact their Area Coordinator or Program Manager, fully document the situation in their field diary and mail it in with their next trip but not issue an SDR.

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. Only record data that you are sure are accurate. If there is sufficient uncertainty, the observer/monitor is advised to not deploy and immediately contact their Area Coordinator or Program Manager.

If you have any questions or require additional information or forms, please contact Mike Tork at 508-495-2339, Mike.Tork@noaa.gov or Lauren Carroll at 508-495-2212, Lauren.Carroll@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. "Hard shell", "pod" or "egg" shaped style life raft.