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Although a rare occurrence, how do you handle a stop by the US Coast Guard or SC Department of Natural Resources when you are out on the water? First thing to remember is not to panic! The stops are being made to keep the waterways safer by ensuring compliance with rules and regulations.

When hailed by an official, cut your speed and follow directions. You will most likely be asked to move to out of the way of boat traffic and then the official will either tie up alongside or get on board your boat allowing his partner(s) to pull away. The first observation by the officer will be whether or not you are connected via lanyard or wireless engine cutoff if you are in a boat less than 26' long per SC law (may be different for other states). While making this observation, he or she will also be looking to see if all children under 12 have an appropriate life preserver on.



Once the cutoff switch connection is found to be in compliance and children are wearing life preservers, the officer will begin checking for registration and safety equipment compliance. The items on his/her checklist will include:

- Registration accessible and up to date with registration numbers on either side of the bow of the boat
- Adherence to number of passengers and weight restrictions
- Throwable flotation device – readily accessible (not in seat or cabin!)
- Life preservers – at least one for each passenger
- Fire extinguisher
- Whistle or horn
- Anchor with rode
- Operational navigation lights
- Visual distress signals

Many of us have started using an inflatable life vest and this counts as a life preserver only if it is being worn at the time of the check!

Keep in mind that the officer will likely have made observations about whether or not you have been following the rules of the road and will be looking for signs of alcohol or drug abuse.

If you are found with no violations, you can go on your way fairly quickly. If you have some type of violation, you may end up with a warning, a fine or being escorted to the nearest dock depending on the degree of severity.

Who is responsible if there is a violation? The Captain is solely responsible – remember that before you leave the dock each and every time!