

Documentation and Tonnage of Smaller Commercial Vessels

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

United States Coast Guard

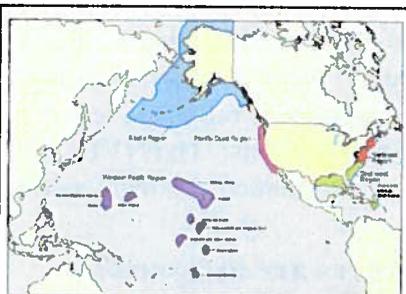
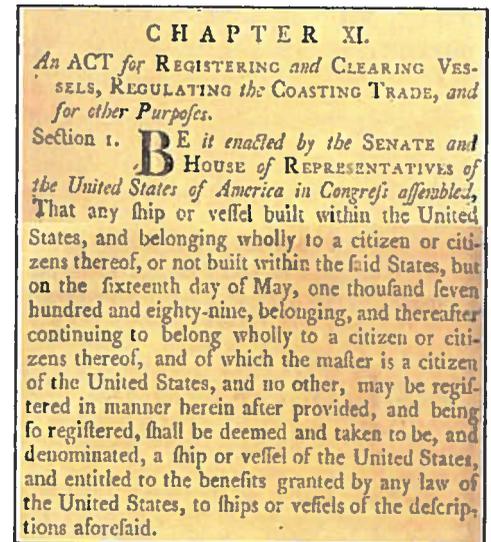


This informational brochure provides an overview of federal documentation and tonnage measurement requirements for owners of U.S. commercial vessels less than 79 feet in overall length. If you own such a vessel, certain restrictions on its commercial use may apply depending on a number of factors, including the nature of its commercial activities, the vessel's net tonnage, and whether the vessel was U.S. built.

Vessel Documentation

What is vessel documentation?

Vessel documentation is a national form of vessel registration, evidenced by a Certificate of Documentation (COD) issued by the Coast Guard's National Vessel Documentation Center (NVDC). It is one of the oldest functions of the federal government, dating back to the 11th Act of the First Congress of September 1, 1789. Documentation provides evidence of nationality for international purposes, facilitates commerce between the states, and admits vessels to certain restricted trades, such as coastwise trade and the fisheries. Since 1920, vessel financing has been enhanced through the availability of preferred mortgages on documented vessels.



Exclusive Economic Zone

The Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is the zone where the United States has jurisdiction over natural resources. The EEZ extends no more than 200 nautical miles from the territorial sea baseline of the United States. Shaded areas represent different regions of the EEZ.

(NOAA Ocean Facts)

Must my commercial vessel be documented?

This depends on both the nature of the commercial activities in which your vessel engages and its net tonnage. Vessels which engage in either **coastwise trade**, or **the fisheries** on navigable waters of the United States or in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), must be documented, subject to certain exclusion or exemption provisions. Vessels of less than five net tons are excluded from documentation. Those vessels measuring five net tons or more that do not operate in either the coastwise trade or the fisheries on the navigable waters of the United States or in the fisheries in the EEZ, are exempt from documentation. Also exempt from documentation are coastwise qualified, non-self-propelled vessels used in coastwise trade within a harbor, on the rivers or lakes (except the Great Lakes) of the United States or the internal waters or canal of any state. The Coast Guard, through the NVDC, administers the documentation laws of the United States.

What is meant by coastwise trade?

Coastwise trade is generally defined as the transportation of merchandise or passengers between points in the United States, its territorial sea, or the EEZ. This includes carriage of passengers, including charter fishing parties, entirely within our territorial waters even if they debark at the point of embarkation, as well as towing, dredging, and salvage activities within these waters. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) administers the coastwise trade laws of the United States.

Vessel Documentation (continued)

What is meant by the fisheries?

In general, the fisheries include processing, transporting (except in foreign commerce), cultivating, storing, catching or harvesting fish, shellfish or marine animals or vegetation in the navigable waters of the United States or the EEZ. Note that, unless the catch is to be sold, charter fishing operations that take customers out to fish are considered coastwise trade and not fisheries activities.

Are there U.S. build requirements?

Yes. Documented vessels must be built in the United States in order to engage in the **coastwise trade** or in the **fisheries**, with limited exceptions. Vessels excluded by virtue of their tonnage or otherwise exempt from documentation must nevertheless be U.S. built and otherwise entitled to be documented with a coastwise endorsement in order to engage in the **coastwise trade**. There is no U.S. build requirement for vessels excluded from documentation by virtue of their tonnage which engage in the **fisheries**.

Documentation Status	Coastwise Trade	Fisheries
Vessel Documented	U.S. Build Required*	U.S. Build Required*
Vessel Not Documented	U.S. Build Required	U.S. Build <u>NOT</u> Required

* unless waived or otherwise excepted

Builder's Certification (form CG-1261)

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
U.S. Coast Guard
BUILDER'S CERTIFICATION AND FIRST TRANSFER OF TITLE

FORM NO. 1925-0027
SEP 08 09 302195

I. PHASE OF CONSTRUCTION COVERED BY THIS CERTIFICATE

ENTIRE CONSTRUCTION
 HULL ONLY
 COMPLETE HULL BY OTHER

YEAR/PHASE OF CONSTRUCTION
YEAR COMPLETED

II. VESSEL DATA

A. HULL IDENTIFICATION NUMBER OR HULL NUMBER
B. VESSEL NAME (IF KNOWN)

C. EQUIPPED WITH ENGINE
 YES NO
OUTBOARD YES NO

D. PLACE OF BUILD (LEFT STATE, COUNTRY)

E. HULL MATERIAL
 ALUMINUM STEEL FIBERGLASS WOOD OTHER

III. DIMENSIONS
(COMPLETE APPROPRIATE DIAGRAMS; DIMENSIONS IN FEET AND TENTHS INCHES)

MONOHULL SHIP-SHAPE
L = _____ B = _____ D = _____

MONOHULL BALBOAT-SHAPE
 DIS. INCT. KEEL FAIRLED KEEL
L = _____ B = _____ D = _____

CATAMARAN-SHAPE
 SHIP SARGE SAIL DIST. INCT. KEEL SAIL FAIRLED KEEL
L = _____ B = _____ D = _____

TRIMARAN-SHAPE
 SHIP SARGE SAIL DIST. INCT. KEEL SAIL FAIRLED KEEL
L = _____ B = _____ D = _____

MONOHULL SARGE-SHAPE
L = _____ B = _____ D = _____

DECKHOUSE FOR HOUSEBOAT OR SIMILAR
L = _____ B = _____ D = _____

IV. UNITED STATES BUILD STATEMENT

ALL MAJOR COMPONENTS USED IN THE PHASE OF CONSTRUCTION COVERED BY THIS CERTIFICATE WERE FABRICATED IN THE UNITED STATES.

ALL CONSTRUCTION AND ALL ASSEMBLY FOR THIS PHASE OF CONSTRUCTION WERE DONE IN THE UNITED STATES.

CG-1261 (07/13) PREVIOUS EDITION OBSOLETE

Are there exceptions to U.S. build requirements?

Yes. Certain vessels that are captured, forfeited, or wrecked may be excepted. Also, the Maritime Administration (MARAD) can issue **waivers** for foreign-built vessels or vessels of unknown or unprovable build to operate as commercial passenger vessels that carry no more than 12 passengers for hire. This requires a public notification and comment process, and an application fee.

How is build evidence established?

Build evidence for documented vessels is normally established through owner submission of an original Builder's Certification and First Transfer of Title (form **CG-1261**), completed by the builder as part of the documentation process. Copies are not accepted. Please be aware that there is no similar federal form to establish build evidence for vessels that measure less than five net tons. The NVDC may waive this build evidence requirement under certain circumstances.

What identification numbers are assigned?

A documented vessel is assigned an official number, which appears on the COD and is marked on some clearly visible interior structural part of the hull. Other unique identifiers may be assigned to, and marked on, a vessel under federal or state requirements, such as state numbers and hull identification numbers (HINs). These numbers are useful in

identifying a vessel's documentation status, and obtaining other important vessel information from vessel data systems such as the Coast Guard's publicly available **PSIX** system.

Is a documented vessel exempt from state jurisdiction?

No. All documented vessels must comply with the laws of the state in which they are operated. The vessel's COD must be shown to state law enforcement personnel upon demand. States may require documented vessels to be registered (but not state numbered) and to display state decals showing that they have complied with state requirements.

Examples of Vessel Numbering

Official Number	1240950
State Number	FL 0001 AB
Hull Id Number	XYZ12345L485