

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

### Coast Guard Visual Distress Signal Requirements

#### What is the requirement and where does it apply?

Visual distress signals must be carried on all boats which are operated on the high seas, coastal waters (including the Great Lakes), the territorial seas and all waters directly connected to the great lakes or the territorial seas up to a point where the waters are less than two miles wide.

See what Safety Experts recommend. [Click here](#).

#### Who is covered by the requirement?

All boats are covered by the requirement if operating on the designated waters at night. During daytime operation, the following boats do not need to comply with the requirement: (i) recreational boats less than 16 feet in length; (ii) boats participating in organized events, such as races, regattas, and parades; (iii) open sailboats not equipped with propulsion machinery and less than 26 feet in length; and (iv) manually propelled boats.

#### My boat never breaks down, why should I comply?

First, pursuant to the Coast Guard regulations, the Coast Guard may impose a civil penalty up to \$1,100 for failure to comply with equipment requirements. Second, one never knows when an emergency on the water will occur, whether to you or someone you assist. Risking a fine is one thing; your ability to signal others to a distress situation which could affect you and your family is another.

#### What types of Visual Distress Signals have been accepted by the Coast Guard?

[View signals table](#)

#### What type of flares do I need?

There are a number of flares that you can use depending on your boating habits. See Orion's Products Recommendation Guide to find the flares that best meet your needs. [Go >>](#)

#### How do I know if a signal meets the Coast Guard requirements?

Only visual signals marked with a U.S. Coast Guard approval or certification number meet the Coast Guard requirements.

#### Since I am covered by the requirement, how many signals do I need to carry?

If you select pyrotechnic signals (including red parachute aerial flares, handheld red signal flares and handheld orange smoke flares) to meet the Coast Guard visual distress signal requirements, **a minimum of three must be carried**. Any combination of the signals can be carried so long as they add up to three signals for day use and three signals for night use. Remember that while three signals are the **legal minimum**, search and rescue experts recommend carrying at least six signals onboard.

#### Will my visual distress signals expire?

Pyrotechnic signaling devices (including aerial flares and hand held signals) expire 42 months after the date of manufacture in accordance with the Coast Guard requirements. Typically, this means that you must replace your flares every three boating seasons. [More info >>](#)