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Registering Your Homebuilt Boat

By Jeff Spira

Many builders wonder how to register their homebuilt boats with their states or regions. Since I have no experience doing it outside my own state in the US, but I have discussed it with many builders in the US and Canada, and have done some research so can offer advice in these areas, this will only apply to the US and Canada. In other western countries, I suspect it's very similar to the US and Canada but have no direct knowledge of these processes. Every state in the US and Province in Canada has slightly different rules and regulations but all follow a common thread. If you go to your State or Province's website, you will be able to navigate to the specific regulations you need to follow, and in just about everyone I've looked over, you will be able to download the appropriate paperwork to apply for a boat registration.

Firstly, not all boats require registration. Check your local State or Province regulations, but in general, boats that are oar, paddle or pedal powered and boats that are smaller than a certain size often do not require registration. It's a good rule of thumb, though, that if you are planning to put a gasoline, diesel, or electric motor in your boat, it will need to be registered.

Nearly all registration forms begin with a unique hull number. Since you built the hull, it will not have a number. In some States, you can number your hull yourself, but in other's a State assigned inspector will have to come look at your boat to ensure it was truly built by you and will assign you a hull number. When you receive this number, you must permanently affix it to the hull. In some cases, you can carve this into a main beam, attach name plate or some other permanent method.

It is highly likely that the government inspector will ask to see your receipts for materials that you built the boat from. After Hurricane Katrina, the state of Louisiana clamped down on people finding boats, pulling off the numbers and claiming they built them themselves, so keeping records of your purchases or where you obtained materials is important.

You will also want a Carpenter's Certificate. Some places (like Alaska) require one, and for other's it's a useful piece of documentation. Carpenter's Certificates have been used for hundreds of years certifying the name of the builder of a vessel. If for no other reason than tradition, it's a good idea to create a



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Carpenter's Certificate for your homebuilt boat. I have created a Carpenter's Certificate form that you may download for free below. Just fill it out and sign it and it becomes a permanent part of your boat's history.

The registration authority may request a calculation of the displacement and load carrying capability of your boat plus a calculation of the maximum horsepower of the hull. If you have built one of my boats, just email, and I'll send you this information. If you have built some other designer's, you can ask them or calculate these numbers using the U.S. Coast Guard Safety Standards for Backyard Boat Builders publication. This is available for download from the US or Canadian Coast Guard's website or from some designer's sites as well.

Once you collect all of this information and fill out the registration application, all you need to do is file it with your State or Province, along with their filing fee, and sometimes use taxes depending on whether you paid sales taxes on the materials you purchased, and the state will issue you license numbers along with their rules on how the ID numbers need to be affixed to your boat, and a registration form identifying you as the registered owner of the vessel.

Free Carpenter's Certificate

Appendix A, is a free Master Carpenter's certificate you may use freely for your boat