



Frequently Asked Questions:

Liferafts

Q: Where in the ISAF Offshore Special Regulations can I get the requirements for an approved liferaft?

The relevant sections are found in Sections 4.20.2 (a, b, c and d), 4.20.3, 4.20.4, 4.20.5. These sections cover topics such as capacity, type (SOLAS, ORC, ISAF or ISO), packing, storage and servicing.

Q: How do I match up liferaft capacity with the number of crew aboard.

The capacity of the required liferaft must be the same or greater than the number of crew. For example, as there are no seven person liferafts available, a seven person crew requires an eight person liferaft. It is not acceptable to have a six person liferaft and a survival suit. A crew of twelve requires a twelve person liferaft or two (2) six person liferafts or a combination of a four and an eight person liferaft.

Q: What types of liferafts approvals are acceptable?

All liferafts must meet the relevant sections of the ISAF Offshore Special Regulations. However various approving authorities all certify liferafts that can be compliant. Regardless of which type is chosen, the liferaft status /servicing certificate must indicate which standard of approval with which it complies. Transport Canada and USCG also issue liferaft approvals, mostly to the SOLAS standard.

SOLAS (International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea) – These are generally the liferafts seen on commercial craft – large capacity, stored in fibreglass canisters and with a complete set of provisions. They are built and tested to the International Maritime Organization’s SOLAS Lifesaving Appliances Code. ISAF allows SOLAS liferafts to be valise stored, provided the storage complies with 4.20.3 and 4.20.4.

ORC (Offshore Racing Council) – This is an older standard of offshore yachting liferafts and the specifications can be found as part of the Offshore Special Regulations, Appendix A, Part I. These older liferafts must be stored in a rigid container and have annual inspection requirements. These liferafts are getting long in the tooth and may not be suitable for subsequent races.

ISAF (International Sailing Federation) – This is the newer standard of offshore yachting liferaft, the specifications can be found as part of the Offshore Special Regulations, Appendix A, Part II.

ISO (International Standards Organization) – ISAF has a general policy to support ISO Standards as the primary reference. Liferafts built to ISO 9650 are acceptable and now widely available. However, ISO compliant liferafts must meet the more stringent ISO 9650 Part 1, Type 1, Group A which requires a number of additions in order to be compliant with the Offshore Special Regulations. It must have a thermal insulated floor, boarding ramp and a means to “top off” (manually inflate) the ramp.

Q: What supplies must the liferaft be equipped with?

A liferaft is packed with a number of items whose inventory is part of the type approval. The liferaft pack can be custom-specified to exceed the basic standard. In addition, items specified in other parts of the Special Regulations (such as Section 4.21 Grab Bag) may be packed into the liferaft, if appropriate. Such equipment is not required to be duplicated in a grab bag or on board the yacht.

For Example the SOLAS "A" Pack included with a SOLAS certified liferaft includes:

SOLAS pack "A" first aid kit	Anti-Seasickness Tablets	Puncture repair kit
Sea anchor and spare sea anchor	Paddles	Core Plugs
1.5 litres of water per person	6 Hand held distress flares	2 safety knives
Tin opener	4 red distress parachute flares	Whistle
Food	2 smoke/dye markers (Optional)	Heliograph (signal mirror)
Fishing line and hook	Sponges (to dry floor)	Torch with spare batteries and bulbs
Thermal Protection Sheet	Pump (to pump up the floor)	Plastic bag
	Bailer	

Q: How should the liferaft be stored on board?

A liferaft packaged in a rigid container or canister can be stored on deck, in the cockpit, or in a self-draining compartment opening onto the deck.

A liferaft packaged in a soft valise, which weighs more than 40 kg (88.18 lb), can be stored only in a self-draining compartment opening onto the deck. A liferaft packaged in a valise, which weighs less than 40 kg (88.18 lb), may stored be stored below decks on a yacht with a series date before 2001. This is the only case of a liferaft being able to be stored below deck.

Regardless of the storage arrangement, it must comply with OSR Section 4.20.4, Liferaft Launching which requires that it take no longer than 15 seconds to get the liferaft from its storage position to the rail of the boat.

Q: Are there any other considerations for storing a liferaft?

**** Please take note of this Important Notice from Offshore Special Regulations, 4.20.5****

“Recent evidence has shown that packaged liferafts are vulnerable to serious damage when dropped (e.g. from a boat onto a marina pontoon) or when subjected to the weight of a crew member or heavy object (e.g. an anchor). Damage can be caused internally by the weight of the heavy steel CO2 bottle abrading or splitting neighbouring layers of buoyancy tube material. ISAF has instituted an investigation into this effect and as an interim measure requires that every valise-packed liferaft shall have an annual certificate of servicing. A liferaft should be taken for servicing if there is any sign of damage or deterioration (including on the underside of the pack). Persons in charge should insist on great care in handling liferafts and apply the rules NO STEP and DO NOT DROP UNLESS LAUNCHING INTO THE SEA.”

Liferafts may be damaged as a result of transportation to and from the yacht after servicing, such damage would go unnoticed until it was called into duty – bad timing!

Q: How often does a liferaft need to be serviced?

Regardless of liferaft type approval, current servicing status / certificates are required which indicate the specification to which the liferaft was built. Each liferaft type has slightly different servicing requirements. Generally, older liferafts require more frequent servicing as the components and joints deteriorate over time. As a matter of good seamanship, you should consider having the liferaft serviced as part of your race preparation, even if the certificate is still valid.