Marco Island Offers Free Vessel Safety Checks for Area Boaters

America's Boating Club

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By Scott H. Shook

Photos by Scott H. Shook
| Bill Kreppein with his SOS beacon and dry bag.

When Ed Bauer arrived at the Stevens Landing docks Friday morning to inspect Bill Kreppein's boat, he probably had no idea how easy his job was going to be.

You see Kreppein is a graduate of the Merchant Marine Academy, and as one might expect, his boat was in tip-top shape.

Bauer is a certified vessel examiner with America's Boating Club-Marco Island, a unit of the United States Power Squadrons, a 105-year-old, 342-chapter national recreational boating organization.

"We provide the vessel safety check service as a public service to the boating public on Marco to help ensure they're in compliance with the Coast Guard regulations," Bauer said. "I've done over 100 inspections. Our organization here has been recognized as being a leader in terms of vessel safety checks."

"The Club's certified Vessel Safety Examiners will survey your watercraft's safety equipment, such as life vests, flares, fire extinguishers, horns, lights, et cetera, to make sure that they meet current regulatory standards," said Wanda Burson, Commander of America's Boating Club® – Marco Island. "In addition, they will determine whether your vessel satisfies state registration requirements."

"Bill's going to show us some personal floatation devices," Bauer said. "PFDs are even required for kayaks. There aren't many requirements for kayaks, but that's one of them."

Bauer is one of several certified vessel examiners with the Marco Island chapter.

Bill Kreppein proudly displays his 2021 Vessel Safety Check decal.

"We do inspections on Marco Island, Isles of Capri and Port of the Islands," Bauer said. "If a boat doesn't pass, we make an appointment to come back some other time when the corrections are made.

"There are other items – like the mounting of a fire extinguisher – that are recommended and discussion items. You have to have a fire extinguisher, but it doesn't have to be mounted. We would discuss why it would be a good idea to have it mounted."

Bauer ticks the required items off his list of requirements and discussion issues.

"Bill, where's your fire extinguisher," Bauer asks.

Kreppein points beneath his console.

"He's got it and it's mounted besides," Bauer said with a smile.

Next Bauer examines the vessel's visual distress signals.

"Bill has a floating locater electronic SOS beacon," Bauer notes, "which is an improvement over flares."

"These are fantastic," Kreppein said of the SOS beacon. "There's no way to test a flare. And this costs about $80 and lasts forever. You buy flares every three years and never use them."

"And if you're not careful you can be burned with a flare," Bauer adds, "or you can burn your boat."

Next on Bauer's checklist is a sound producing device.

"A bell, a whistle or anything that marks a lot of noise," Bauer said.

Kreppein presses a button and produces two short blasts with his boat horn.

"I carry a horn, too," Kreppein said. Kreppein even has a whistle on board.

"If people don't have a horn, I give them a whistle," Bauer said. "You can pick them up on Amazon.com."

"We also look at the overall condition of the vessel," Bauer said. "Does it look safe?"

After completing the vessel safety check, Bauer congratulates Kreppein on his vessel and presents him with his 2021 Vessel Safety Check decal.

"When your vessel passes inspection," Burson said, "you receive a VSC decal that signals to marine law enforcement authorities that your boat was recently found to be in compliance with Florida boating laws for the current year."

Vessel inspector Ed Bauer checks the boat registration information.

America's Boating Club-Marco Island encourages all local boaters to call for a free vessel safety check. This free service is available to all Marco Island watercraft owners. You do not need to be a member of America's Boating Club to take advantage of this free service. Call 239-393-0150 or visit MarcoBoatingClub.org for details.