

There are a number of organisations which offer “sea-goers” guides, standards and regulations covering various aspects of boat construction and equipment safety. In the international arena, these are:

- IMO - the International Marine Organisation,
- ISAF - the International Sailing Federation (the ORC was subsumed into ISAF in 2004)
- ISO - the International Standards Organisation.

Why International? Quite simply boats sail across borders and so it is wise to address the International Standards rather than apply British Standards which (like driving on the left side of the road) might not be acceptable overseas.

IMO, a UN agency subscribed to by 162 Governments deals primarily with the safety of shipping. The International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea – SOLAS, which gives standards for liferaft, was adopted by IMO in 1959 and, although drafted with vessels of over 24 metres in length in mind, includes many features of design equally applicable to smaller craft especially if these are ocean going. Indeed the MCA SCV Codes require Categories 0 vessels to carry IMO SOLAS liferafts as does the ISAF safety recommendations for trans-oceanic races, Special Regulations category 0 races.

But SOLAS liferafts, being designed to be carried on open decks and launched from 20 metres high etc. are often considered too heavy, bulky and over engineered for use with small powerboats and yachts. For this reason, in the absence of any other internationally accepted standard, the ISAF developed and specified it's own liferaft standards for use in long distance and well offshore races.

The **ISAF** liferaft is the most commonly carried raft on board recreational craft. Formally the ORC raft, the ISAF liferaft specification underwent a major overhaul subsequent to the 1998 Sydney Hobart race in which three lives were lost as a result of liferaft failure. The new specification known as the Appendix A, **PART 2** liferaft came into effect at the beginning of 2003. Rafts built to this specification are arguably the most suitable to be carried by any boat going offshore (but not trans-oceanic) for relatively short periods of time. **If you intend buying a new raft for this type of use then make sure it is to the new ISAF Appendix A, PART 2 specification, not the earlier (ORC or RORC) design.**

ISO, that is the International Standards Organisation, issued 2 liferaft standards during 2005 one of which has since been accepted by the ISAF as an equivalent, subject to some caveats, in particular the need for the raft to have a “boarding ramp”. Details of this equivalent are contained in the ISAF Regulations as follows:-

ISO 9650 Part 1 Type 1 Group A (ISO) when each liferaft shall contain at least a Pack 2 (<24h) and:-

- (i) shall have a semi-rigid boarding ramp, and*
- (ii) shall be so arranged that any high-pressure hose shall not impede the boarding process, and*
- (iii) shall have a topping-up means provided for any inflatable boarding ramp, and*
- (iv) when the liferaft is designed with a single ballast pocket this shall be accepted provided the liferaft otherwise complies with ISO 9650 and meets a suitable test of ballast pocket strength devised by the manufacturer and*
- (v) compliance with OSR 4.20.2 (d) i-v shall be indicated on the liferaft certificate.*

MCA SCV Codes

The latest MCA recommendations for Small Commercial Vessels (SCV), MGN 280, are that new liferafts for category 0 and 1 vessels should be to SOLAS standard, Wheelmarked or DfT approved. Category 2, 3, 4 and 5 vessels shall be as for category 0 and 1 or to ISAF Appendix A, Part 2 (which includes ISO). The RYA applies this recommendation to vessels being newly Coded as it believes it to be in the best interests of safety.

The former MCA Codes, prior to the issue of MGN 280, reference the older ORC liferaft as still acceptable for vessels already Coded for categories 2, 3, 4 and 5. These will remain valid until the end of their serviceable life. It is also currently the case that a vessel may still be Coded afresh under the old Codes and can therefore apply the older Code requirements for liferafts and hence the lesser standard. The RYA will Code a vessel accordingly but in such cases it will apply all of the requirements of the older Code and may only issue a certificate after receipt of a signed declaration from the owner or agent as to the vessel being equipped with the lesser standard specification liferaft(s).