



National Vessel Documentation Center

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: COMMONLY USED TERMS, DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Below are some commonly used terms and definitions that you may find useful as you browse our website.

Ballast - A heavy substance used to improve stability and control the draft of a vessel.

Beam - The breadth of a vessel; also, a main support running from side to side of a vessel supporting the deck.

Bow - The forward end of a vessel.

Bowsprit – A structure projecting forward from the bow. Originally bowsprits were used on sailing vessels to carry the sail forward and support the mast by stays or wires.

Bulkhead - An upright partition dividing a vessel's compartments.

Bulwark - The side of a vessel extending above the main deck.

Citizen - unless expressly provided otherwise, means a person meeting the applicable citizenship requirements of [46 CFR 67.30 \(subpart C\)](#) of this part as a United States citizen. Citizenship is established by completion of form CG-1258. Individuals, corporations, partnerships, and other entities capable of holding legal title may be deemed citizens for documentation purposes.

Deficiency Letter – correspondence issued by our office which advises the customer of issues related to a submission submitted for filing.

Depth - The vertical distance taken at or about amidships (middle of the vessel) from the uppermost edges of the skin at the side of the hull to the bottom skin of the hull, excluding the keel. The keel may be included in the depth if the distance to the bottom skin of the hull cannot be determined reasonably.

Draft - The depth of water a vessel draws (i.e. The distance from the waterline to the bottom of the vessel). Customers frequently confuse the vessel's draft with the vessel's depth. The depth is always greater than the draft of the vessel.

Duplicate Submissions – Do not submit your information more than once. The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990 codified at 46 USC 2110 requires that the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) establish user fees for USCG National Vessel Documentation Center (NVDC) services.



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In accordance with Title 46 of the Code of Federal Regulations, [Subpart 67.500\(d\)](#) all application fees are non-refundable. The application fees are associated with reviewing the paperwork submitted to see if it complies with regulatory and statutory requirements. It is not associated with actually getting a product.

Freeboard - The amount of the vessel which is out of the water. Draft + Freeboard = Depth (at mid ship).

Gunwale - The upper edge of a vessel's side.

Hailing Port – The hailing port must be a place in the United States included in the U.S. Department of Commerce's Federal Information Processing Standards Publication 55DC. The hailing port must include the State, territory, or possession in which it is located.

HIN/Hull Number – The hull identification number (HIN) is a unique identification number comprised of the country code, manufacturer's ID, production or serial number, month/year of production and model year (similar to a car's vehicle identification number (VIN)). In accordance with [33 CFR 181.23](#), manufacturers shall identify each boat produced (or imported) with a primary and secondary hull identification number (HIN) permanently affixed to the vessel (as per [33 CFR 181.29](#)).

IMO Number – The IMO Ship Identification Number is a unique seven-digit number assigned to propelled, seagoing vessels of 100 gross tons and above. The number is assigned by Lloyd's Register – Fairplay Ltd. on behalf of the IMO. It consists of the three letters IMO followed by seven numbers.

Initial Documentation – is the term used when a vessel is being documented with the U.S. Coast Guard for the first time.

Keel - A timber or place extending lengthwise from bow to stern at the bottom of a vessel.

Official Number – the Official Number (O/N) is the 6 or 7 digit number awarded to the vessel at the time it is first documented with the US Coast Guard. This number remains with the vessel indefinitely and should be marked in accordance with [46 CFR 67.121](#).

Ownership Change – this term is used when the ownership of a documented vessel changes. These changes may be the result of a divorce, death, sale of vessel, etc.

Preferred Mortgage - A preferred mortgage is a mortgage which is given status as a maritime lien. As such, it enjoys a certain priority in the event of default. In addition, the Coast Guard is



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prohibited from making certain changes in documentation including, but not limited to, change of vessel ownership, name, and hailing port without consent of the mortgagee.

Probate – is the official proving of a will.

Redocumentation/Reissue (Exchange, Reinstatement or Return to Documentation) – is the term used for a vessel which has already been documented.

Exchange - is the term used when changes are made to the Certificate of Documentation (COD) for a vessel which is currently documented with the U.S. Coast Guard. The changes may include ownership, vessel name, hailing port, and/or endorsement(s).

Return to Documentation – is the term used when a previously documented vessel was deleted from documentation and is now being documented with the U.S. Coast Guard again.

Reinstatement of Documentation – is the term used when the COD for a documented vessel has expired and was not renewed in a timely manner.

Renewal of Documentation – is the term used to renew the COD for a documented vessel. Recreational vessels may be renewed for a period of 1-5 years. Commercial vessels are not eligible for multi-year documents and must continue to be renewed annually.

Replacement of Documentation – is the term used when the COD for a documented vessel has been wrongfully withheld, lost or mutilated.

Rudder - A flat piece or structure of wood or metal attached to a vessel at the stern so that it can be turned causing the vessel to turn.

Sale – the exchange of a commodity for money; the action of selling something.

Skin - The outside planking or plating of a vessel.

Stem - The upright bow frame, usually curved in shape, which connects to the keel at its forward most end. In fiberglass construction, where frames are not used, “stem” refers to the forward most part of the hull of the vessel.

Stern - The after end of a vessel.

Superstructure - The enclosed structural part of a vessel above the main deck.

Swim Platform - Also called Swim Step. A platform, usually added to the stern of a vessel, used for boarding a vessel from the water.



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Tender/Dinghy – is a boat, or a larger ship used to service or support other boats or ships, generally by transporting people or supplies to and from shore or another ship. Smaller boats may also have tenders, usually called dinghies. Documentation of a vessel does not cover the vessel's tender or dinghy. These craft fall within the jurisdiction of the motorboat numbering laws of the state of principal use.

Tonnage (46 CFR 69)- means the volume of a vessel's spaces, including portable enclosed spaces, as calculated under a measurement system in this part, and is categorized as either gross or net.

Gross tonnage refers to the volumetric measure of the overall size of a vessel. Net tonnage refers to the volumetric measure of the useful capacity of the vessel. Deck cargo is not included in tonnage. A vessel must measure at least five net tons and, with the exception of certain oil spill response vessels, must be wholly owned by a citizen of the U.S. For information about how tonnages are determined, [click here](#) for simplified measurement form that calculates tonnages.

Formal measurement involves the calculation of net tonnage using a complex series of measurements, exemptions and deductions, and is performed by an authorized measurement organization for a substantive fee paid by the vessel owner.

Simplified measurement involves the calculation of net tonnage using a simplified formula, with owner-provided principal dimensions and other characteristics as the inputs.

Third Party Companies - The NVDC is aware that there are commercial entities that offer to manage the certification/renewal process on behalf of vessel owners for a fee. The Coast Guard does not endorse any of these companies, and they do not operate on behalf of the Coast Guard in any way. Any fees charged or agreements offered by such companies are in no way associated with the NVDC certification process. In addition, these companies are not authorized to issue any form of documentation, including travel letters and/or permits that authorize operation of ANY vessel.

Transfer of Interest – is when title to property or assets change from one person to another. This is usually accomplished through a sale, though it can also happen by means of a gift.

Wheelhouse - The structure in which a steering wheel is located for the steering or navigation of the vessel.



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Below is a list of abbreviations used on our website or are found on the historical Abstract of Title; however, the list below puts them in one convenient location.

Historical Abstract of Title abbreviations:

AF - Affidavit
AGPM – Assignment of Preferred Mortgage
AGCL – Assign Notice/Claim of Lien
AGM – Assignment of Mortgage
APM – Assumption of Preferred Mortgage
AMCL – Amend Notice/Claim of Lien
AMM – Amend Mortgage
AMPM – Amend Preferred Mortgage
APPM – Assumption of Preferred Mortgage
ASSN - Association
BKCY - Bankruptcy
BS – Bill of Sale
CORP - Corporation
CP – Community Property
CPRS – Community Property w/ Survivorship
CSVN - Conservator
CTO – Court Order
DG – Deed of Gift
EXX – Executor/Executrix
FCL - Foreclosure
FLPM – Fleet Preferred Mortgage
FRF – Forfeiture
GP – General Partner/General Partnership
ILA – Interlender Agreement
INC - Incorporated
JT – Joint Tenants
JTRS – Joint Tenants w/ survivorship
JV – Joint Venture
LP – Limited Partner/Limited Partnership
LTD - Limited
LQ - Liquidation
MRG – Merger
MTG - Mortgage
NCL/CL – Notice of Claim of Lien
ONC – Owner Name Change
OPL – Operation of Law



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OT - Other
PM – Preferred Mortgage
PR – Personal Representative
RCVR - Receiver
SB – Subordination Agreement
SCL – Satisfaction of Claim of Lien
SMTG – Satisfaction of Mortgage
SPM – Supplement to Mortgage
SPPM – Supplement to Preferred Mortgage
TBE – Tenants by Entirety
TIC – Tenants in Common
TI – Transfer of Interest
TSTE – Trustee
TSTM – Trustee, Mortgagee
UTA – Under Trust Arrangement
WVR - Waiver

Other abbreviations:

AT – Abstract of Title
CFR – Code of Federal Regulations
COD – Certificate of Documentation
COO – Certificate of Ownership
FAQs – Frequently Asked Questions
IMO – International Maritime Organization
NVDC – National Vessel Documentation Center
USCG – United States Coast Guard
USC or US Code – United States Code
US – United States
NOAA – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
OMB – Office of Management and Budget