

# Technical Bulletin

## Lifebuoys

*The UK Club's ship inspectors frequently find incorrectly rigged lifebuoys on ships visited*

Lifebuoys should be readily available and equally distributed on both sides of the ship, with at least one in the vicinity of the stern. All should be capable of being rapidly cast loose and at least half should be provided with self-igniting lights. Apart from those on the bridge wings it is recommended that the lifebuoys should weigh 2.5 kg. (SOLAS minimum weight).

The bridge-wing lifebuoys should be capable of quick release and have self-activating smoke and light signals attached. To facilitate quick release they should weigh a minimum of 4 kg.

On some Japanese-built ships it may be found that they are equipped with separate light and smoke signals: these lifebuoys would normally be 2.5 kg.



Smoke float wrongly rigged inboard of bridge wing



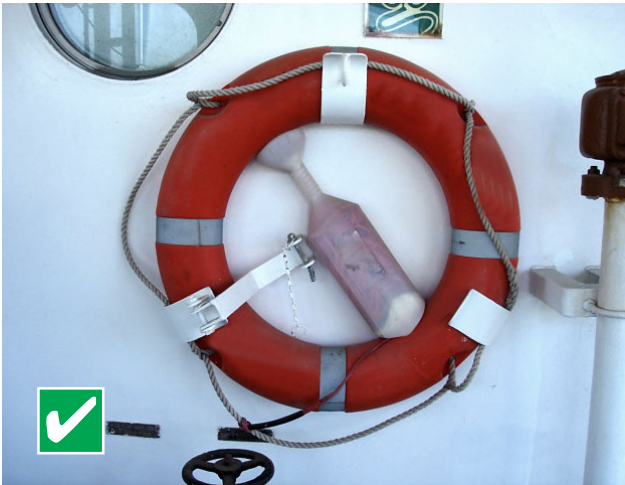
Wrong: Lifebuoy rigged with light & line



Lifebuoy and smoke float correctly rigged



Correct: Lifebuoy with line



**Lifebuoy with line thrower**

At least one lifebuoy on each side of the ship shall be fitted with a buoyant lifeline, the length of which should be more than twice the height from its stowage position to the waterline when the ship is in ballast condition (or 30 metres whichever is the greater). The lines should be non-kinking, have a diameter greater than 8mm, and a breaking strength of more than 5kN. These lines are often found tightly coiled and bound, meaning time wasted freeing up and deploying the lifebuoy. The life line should be secured to the body of the lifebuoy and not to the grab rope.

Although it is not a specific requirement of the regulations, we suggest a sensible location for them would be towards the after part of the vessel. Our inspectors when visiting ships at anchor, especially in the Mississippi river, often see lifebuoys sensibly deployed, with the line attached to the ship's rail a little distance aft of the gangway, so that the lifebuoy is suspended just above the water. Anyone unfortunate enough to fall from the gangway may therefore be able to grab the lifebuoy as he is swept astern.



**Wrong: Lifebuoy rigged with line at pilot boarding**

Another mistake commonly made is to have a floating line attached to the lifebuoy at the pilot station. The International Marine Pilots Association requires, at the boarding station, a lifebuoy with a light attached and a heaving line coiled aft of the bulwark ladder. This heaving line is to bring the pilot's bag onboard and should be free from the lifebuoy. If the pilot should fall into the water, the pilot boat will recover him and any floating line attached to a lifebuoy could foul the propeller.



**Lifebuoy deployed at gangway**

Further guidance can be found in SOLAS Chapter V regulation 23.7.1