

SAFETY AT SEA - Safety at Sea Update

COF and LGSC

A Certificate of Fitness (COF) for sailing and power boats in South Africa is a mandatory annual legal document issued by [SA Sailing](#) or SAMSA approved surveyors, confirming the vessel is seaworthy and equipped for safe operation. It requires a valid, up-to-date buoyancy certificate and proof of safety equipment, including navigation lights, life jackets, and flares.

Key Requirements for a Sailing COF:

- **Valid Documentation:** A [valid buoyancy certificate](#) (not older than 5 years) and a [Certificate of Listing \(CO\)](#) from SA Sailing are required.
- **Safety Equipment:** A full, updated list of safety gear (life jackets, flares, fire extinguishers, VHF radio, anchor, etc.) must be onboard.
- **Inspection:** The vessel must pass a physical inspection by a SA Sailing Safety or SAMSA Officer, usually with the boat on a trailer, or on the water only if it has a valid hull inspection.
- **Validity:** The COF is valid for 12 months from the date of issue and must be renewed annually.

In South Africa, commercial vessels registered with the South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) are required to hold a **Local General Safety Certificate (LGSC)**, which serves as their official Certificate of Fitness (CoF).

To obtain a COF for a vessel, the following must be in place:

- **Survey Inspection:** The vessel must pass an annual survey conducted by a SAMSA-appointed surveyor or authorized safety officer.
- **Safety Equipment:** A full, updated list of mandatory safety gear must be on board, including life jackets (SABS/SAMSA approved), fire extinguishers, flares, and distress signals.
- **Valid Buoyancy:** An up-to-date buoyancy certificate (not older than 5 years) must be provided.
- **Skipper's License:** A valid Certificate of Competency (COC) is required.
- **ICASA Radio License:** Required for categories B, C, and D.
- **Marking:** The vessel must be registered and marked correctly.

Key Requirements for LGSC

- **Registration:** The vessel must be registered on the SA ships register with [SAMSA](#).
- **Surveyor:** Safety and hull inspections must be conducted by a SAMSA Small Vessel Surveyor or an authorized Agent (such as specific SA Sailing Safety Officers).
- **Validity:** The LGSC is valid for 12 months from the date of the safety inspection.
- **Documentation:** Before the survey, owners must complete a safety inspection check sheet.
- **Hull Inspection:** For vessels in the water, a hull inspection by a safety officer is required every 4 years, with interim inspections by the owner.

Commercial Safety Categories

Commercial vessels are classified by their operational distance from shore, which dictates specific safety requirements:

- **Cat A:** Any distance from shore.
- **Cat B:** Less than 40 nautical miles from shore.
- **Cat C:** Less than 15 nautical miles from shore.
- **Cat D:** Less than 5 nautical miles from shore.
- **Cat E:** Less than 1 nautical mile from shore (and max 15nm from an approved launch site).

Key Regulations & Procedures

- **Validity:** The COF is valid for 12 months, provided no structural changes are made.
- **Non-Compliance:** Operating without a valid COF can lead to fines, penalties, or insurance claims being rejected.
- **Inspection Procedure:** The owner must prepare the vessel, including completing a safety checklist before the inspector arrives.
- **Hull Inspection:** For vessels in the water, a hull inspection is required every 4 years.
- **Commercial Specifics:** Commercial vessels may be searched by officials without a warrant to ensure compliance with regulations.

Safety Equipment and Procedures

The LGSC requires compliance with the Merchant Shipping (National Small Vessel Safety) Regulations of 2007, which include:

- **Buoyancy:** Valid (not older than 5 years) buoyancy certificate or life raft service certificate.
- **Signaling:** Approved, unexpired flares (hand-held, rocket, smoke).
- **Safety Gear:** Approved life jackets, fire extinguishers, anchors, and a watertight capsized bottle.
- **Communication/Navigation:** VHF radio (with ICASA license), GPS/chartplotter, and a magnetic compass.

Procedures for Commercial Vessels

1. **Preparation:** Complete the relevant safety check sheet before the survey.
2. **Survey:** Contact a local SAMSA office or an approved SAMSA safety surveyor to organize the inspection.
3. **Registration Number:** The vessel must have a SAMSA-issued registration number (O/N) inscribed on the transom.
4. **Passenger Vessels:** Commercial vessels carrying more than 12 passengers must comply with stricter passenger vessel regulations.

Important Note: SA Sailing is generally not allowed to issue a CoF for a SAMSA-registered vessel; this must be done via the LGSC process.