



THE TREASURER OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA
DEPARTMENT OF INSURANCE

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chairpersons, Board of County Commissions

FROM: Charles Clark, Director
Division of State Fire Marshal

John M. Ruddell, Director
Division of Waste Management

DATE: June 1, 2001

SUBJECT: Partnership to Properly Manage and Dispose of Out of Date
Visual Distress Signal Flares Generated by Recreational Boaters

With terrific weather and over 8400 miles of coastline Florida is a Mecca for boaters. Florida has over 830,000 registered boaters and an estimated 400,000 boats that visit annually. By Federal law each recreational boat 16 feet and over must carry Visual Distress Signals (VDS). Currently the only United States Coast Guard (USCG) approved VDS are pyrotechnic flares. All flares must have a clearly marked expiration date, which is 42 months past the date of manufacture. Recreational boaters are required to have a minimum of three "in date" flares on board. Therefore, every three years boaters must purchase new flares to replace their out-of-date flares.

In Florida there are 419,321 registered boats 16 feet or larger owned by recreational boaters. It is estimated that approximately 470,000 out-of date flares are generated annually by recreational boaters, not counting the many boats that visit from out of state. It is against the law to set off flares in a "non-emergency situation" (unless special arrangements are made with the USCG and local fire department). Some boaters opt to keep their out-of-date flares on board for emergencies. But many recreational boaters need a safe way to dispose of this household hazardous waste (HHW).

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An environmentally acceptable and safe solution to this problem lies in a partnership between the counties, the Department of Environmental Protection and the Division of State Fire Marshal. The responsibilities of this partnership would consist of the counties accepting flares (and other reactive materials like old ammunition and fireworks) from its citizens through their Household Hazardous Waste Collection Programs. The counties would ensure that these materials were stored in a safe manner. When one or more counties had collected a sufficient quantity of flares they would contact the DEP who in turn would coordinate with the Division of State Fire Marshal to have a trained bomb technician from its Bureau of Fire and Arson Investigations work with the DEP and the county to arrange for a mutually acceptable time and location to conduct thermal destruction.

Flares, old ammunition and fireworks are not inherently dangerous if handled appropriately and with respect. These products are found on store shelves and can be ordered from catalogs. The current county HHW collection facilities should be more than adequate to safely store these materials as they have separate compartments to keep incompatible materials from coming in contact with one another. Metal or plastic 55 gallon drums or 5 gallon metal or plastic bucket, with lids, should be adequate to use as storage containers.

The Division of State Fire Marshal's Bureau of Fire and Arson Investigations has purchased several "burn trailers" as have some county Sheriff's offices and two units have been purchased with DEP grant funds. The mechanics and specifications of these burn trailers have been reviewed by the Department of Environmental Protection's Air and Hazardous Waste staff and have been approved for use for the thermal destruction of out of date flares and unwanted ammunition and fireworks.

On behalf of the Division of State Fire Marshal and the Department of Environmental Protection we ask that the counties join us in this partnership to solve a very real statewide problem in a safe and environmentally acceptable manner. If you have any questions please feel free to call upon the individuals listed below:

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