

# Specific Requirements for Life Rafts

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Back in 1974, SOLAS (the international Safety of Life at Sea commission) was launched with a view to helping regulate any and all maritime occupations and recreational activities, in order to make sure people are kept safe while at sea.

It doesn't matter whether you're captaining a passenger cruise liner or a containment shipping barge, or even if you're simply out on the waves to partake in a spot of sea fishing, the regulations from SOLAS detail what safety equipment must be on board your vessel.

Of course, the main part of any sea-going vessel will always be the life raft – these won't be necessary if your boat never goes more than a couple miles from the shore, but are absolutely vital otherwise.

## The Different Types of Life Raft

Different life rafts are regulated for different numbers of people. A boat which requires a life raft must have enough life raft space to adequately service each and every person on the boat. This means that larger ships will need either more life rafts, or larger ones.

Life boats can also differ in terms of which anchor they use. The most commonly used method is that of buoyancy tubes – whether manual or automatic, these tubes inflate with air to keep the life raft floating. Any ocean-faring life raft must be equipped with double tubes; this helps prevent punctures. The other common flotation type uses pocket ballasts filled with water. These pockets give greater stability on rough waters. Anchor weights tend to be dropped on one long line.

## Life Raft Cover

Any life raft which will be taken out on the ocean needs to have a canvas canopy – this is to protect its occupants from the heat of the midday sun when stranded miles from land. These can come in a number of styles, from partial shade to full shade. The full shade will better protect the passengers from wind and rain.

These covers must be brightly coloured so that other crafts can see them from far off – your vessel will fail its life raft inspection if they're not to specification. Sadly, a canopy has its disadvantages – because they can catch the wind, they make the life raft rather more susceptible to capsizing.

## Life Raft Containment

Even when completely deflated, you may be surprised by just how heavy a life raft can be. Rubber is a heavily material, so they're not exactly easy to carry. This means that the best way to stow a life raft is close to where you'll want to deploy it.

Life rafts can be contained in one of two ways – either valise style or canister. The former is the more popular option, as it folds up more compactly and this allows it to be stored in a place that doesn't impact everyday goings-on. Sadly, this means that it tends to be harder to get to in a case of

emergency.

The canister style of containment is stronger, meaning it can withstand the elements more effectively – this allows you to store in on the deck.

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