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### **Those sinking feelings prompts weed hatch warnings?**

Owners of boats with weed hatches are being reminded by the Boat Safety Scheme to make a routine of checking the security of weed hatch covers before setting off, if they want to avoid that sinking feeling.

The advice follows a number of recent sinkings and partial sinkings where water ingress was through weed hatch openings. The routine should also include checking that the hatch seals are effective and are maintained in good working condition.

BSS Manager, Graham Watts said,  
'For boats with weed hatches, safety will likely depend on the effectiveness of the weed hatch sealing arrangements.

Accepted standards for boats suggest a distance of at least 150mm between the weed hatch top and the normal waterline on the boat, but changes to ballasting or adding equipment during the boat's life may mean the rear of the craft sitting lower in the water.

The boats stern will also naturally pull down when underway, but the disturbance of water from the propeller may test the weed hatch seals every time the boat is put in gear. So make a routine of checking the hatch cover bolts are tight before setting off and any time the hatch is used.

You should also at least annually inspect the hatch body, the cover and sealing gasket to see if they are still in good condition with no early signs of problems,' he added.

**- ENDS -**

**The BSS** is a public safety project owned jointly by the Canal & River Trust, registered as a charity with the charity number 1146792, and the Environment Agency. At least 14 other navigation and harbour authorities have also adopted it. The navigation authorities' purposes for the Scheme are to help reduce the risks of fire, explosion and pollution on small craft. This is done by promoting fire safety and pollution avoidance advice to help boat owners keep themselves and their crews' safe as well as regular examination of fuel systems, gas systems, electrical systems and appliances.

The Scheme also has a monitoring role concerning sinking and man-overboard events in order that any associated causes linked to boat construction or equipment can be identified. It reports the incident data to its advising and managing committees.

**Weed hatch freeboard height requirements for hire boats and small passenger vessels.** The 2002 BSS construction and equipment requirements apply to non-private classes of vessel. Standard 10.3 states that 'a weed hatch, if fitted shall have a cover at least 150mm (6") above the normal laden water-line and shall be watertight when secured.' This requirement acts as good advice for private boat builders and owners.

**The BSS examination and certificate** BSS certificates have a life span of four years. Navigation authorities using the Scheme usually require a valid BSS certificate at the time of licensing, registration, toll renewal or similar. The certificate is issued to boat that is found to be compliant with all the BSS requirements relevant for that boat. These can be found in the BSS Essential Guide which can be freely downloaded or read on [www.boatsafetyScheme.org](http://www.boatsafetyScheme.org) . The compliance check is carried out by an authorized, independent practitioner known as a BSS examiner.