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Registration – Myths about Registration

Belief: If your boat does not have a rudder, it does not have to be registered. (10/19/2022)

Here's a quote from the forum where a person asks: "It is my understanding that the single component, of a vessel, that determines whether or not it is required to be registered, is the "rudder." In other words, a vessel "with" a rudder is "required" to be registered, while a vessel without a rudder is "not" required to be registered. "

Not true: Boat registration requirements have nothing to do with whether or not your boat has a rudder. If this were true then in the USA alone, hundreds of thousands of outboard boats would not have to be registered.

Actually, registration of small craft in the US is a Federal requirement that States register certain types of boats. All this can be found in Title 33 Of the Code of Federal regulations specifically parts 173 and 174. I won't get into the weeds on this but what has happened since that regulation was enacted is that each state has decided that they each have different requirements above and beyond the Federal, which started long ago with boats having mechanical propulsion of 10 HP or more, but now applies to any boat with any means of mechanical propulsion.

33 CFR 173.11 Applicability says in part;

"This subpart applies to each vessel equipped with propulsion machinery of any type used on waters subject to the jurisdiction of the United States and on the high seas beyond the territorial seas for vessels owned in the United States except (and there is a

laundry list of boats that don't have to register, mostly publicly owned boats, but nothing about rudders.)

But I'll cut this short by stating that having a rudder has absolutely nothing to do with it.

And the rest of the story: Perhaps this person is confusing registration, which is required by Federal Regulation and administered by the States and territories, with documentation, which is done by the Coast Guard. Documentation can be done for boats measuring by volume more than 5 net tons. That 5 net tons relates more to the boats cargo volume than to the actual volume of the entire boat. I won't get into the nitty gritty of documenting a boat, but in the rule regarding measurement they take a measurement from the "rudder post". However, if the boat does not have a "rudder post" there is an alternate measurement rule. So documentation does not exempt or exclude boats not having a rudder.