

# Marine Safety Information Bulletin

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## Visual Distress Signal Alternatives and Disposal of Pyrotechnic Flares

The purpose of this Marine Safety Information Bulletin is to educate the boating public on the electric distress light alternative and proper disposal of pyrotechnic visual distress signals (VDS) or marine flares. Flares are required vessel safety equipment because they could alert responders to distress and save your life in the event of a maritime emergency. There are nearly [4 million registered vessels](#) in the Great Lakes, many of these vessels are [required to carry a minimum of three VDS each](#). Because Pyrotechnic VDS have a relatively short shelf life of 36-42 months and may not be discharged in a non-emergency situation, the vast majority will expire unused.

Expired pyrotechnic VDS become increasingly unstable and pose a health and safety hazard if not disposed of properly. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulates pyrotechnic VDS as [explosive hazardous wastes](#) and they are transported as Class 1.4 explosives as required by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT). Pyrotechnic VDS contain strong oxidizers that can pose significant risks to human health and the environment. Additionally, they contain [perchlorates](#) which can contaminate the Great Lakes – our largest source of fresh drinking water.

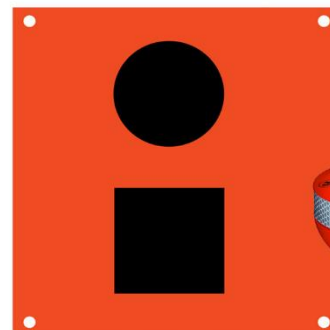
An electric distress light combined with an orange distress flag is a Coast Guard [approved alternative](#) that meets regulatory requirements for day and night use. **This alternative is only authorized for recreational vessels and uninspected passenger vessels (vessels carrying less than 6 passengers for hire).** Opting to carry non-pyrotechnic VDS in lieu of pyrotechnics could significantly reduce the environmental impact of explosive hazardous waste.

The Coast Guard strongly encourages these mariners to transition to the electric distress light alternative and properly dispose of pyrotechnic VDS. The attached table contains a list of Great Lakes state environmental agency contacts, websites, and disposal options for pyrotechnic VDS at household hazardous waste (HHW) collections or through commercial Treatment, Storage and Disposal Facilities (TSDF).

If you have any questions concerning this matter, please contact the Ninth Coast Guard District. For Boating Safety questions, please contact Mr. Michael Baron (Ninth District Recreational Boating Program Specialist) at (571) 607-6907 or [Michael.J.Baron@uscg.mil](mailto:Michael.J.Baron@uscg.mil). For hazardous waste disposal questions, please contact Ms. Nicole Auth (Ninth District Waterways Environmental Protection Specialist) at (571) 614-5038 or [Nicole.D.Auth2@uscg.mil](mailto:Nicole.D.Auth2@uscg.mil).

### Approved Non-Pyrotechnic Devices

NOTE: Carrying both these devices will meet all U.S. Coast Guard day and night requirements.



Minimum 36" Square  
Orange Flag

With black disk and square  
printed on both sides  
(Daytime only)



Handheld  
Electronic Distress  
Signal Device

Min. battery life: 6 hrs.  
(Nighttime only)

# Great Lakes – Pyrotechnic Visual Distress Signal Disposal Resources

**HHW = Household Hazardous Waste / TSDF = Treatment, Storage and Disposal Facility**

State	Disposal Requirements	Website	Contact
<b>Illinois</b>	<b>Flares <u>not accepted</u> at HHW collection.</b> Contact a licensed commercial <a href="#">TSDF</a> for proper disposal. Call ahead, each drop off location might vary on what is accepted.	<a href="#">Illinois Environmental Protection Agency</a>	Ethan Herrick <a href="mailto:Ethan.Herrick@illinois.gov">Ethan.Herrick@illinois.gov</a>
<b>Indiana</b>	Properly dispose of flares at <a href="#">HHW collection events</a> . Call ahead, each drop off location might vary on what is accepted.	<a href="#">Indiana Department of Environmental Management</a>	<a href="mailto:info@idem.IN.gov">info@idem.IN.gov</a>
<b>Michigan</b>	Properly dispose of flares at <a href="#">HHW collection facilities</a> . Call ahead, each drop off location might vary on what is accepted.	<a href="#">Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy</a>	Jarrett Hale <a href="mailto:Halej5@michigan.gov">Halej5@michigan.gov</a>
<b>Minnesota</b>	Properly dispose of flares at <a href="#">HHW collection facilities</a> . Some counties have year-round facilities, while others have seasonal facilities or events. Call ahead, each drop off location might vary on what is accepted.	<a href="#">Minnesota Pollution Control Agency</a>	Teresa Gilbertson <a href="mailto:teresa.gilbertson@state.mn.us">teresa.gilbertson@state.mn.us</a>
<b>New York</b>	Properly dispose of flares at <a href="#">HHW collection facilities</a> . Call ahead, each drop off location might vary on what is accepted.	<a href="#">New York State Department of Environmental Conservation</a>	Kevin Wood <a href="mailto:Kevin.wood@dec.ny.gov">Kevin.wood@dec.ny.gov</a>
<b>Ohio</b>	<b>Flares <u>not accepted</u> at HHW collection.</b> Contact a licensed commercial <a href="#">TSDF</a> for proper disposal. Citizens can contact their <a href="#">Solid Waste Management District</a> . Call ahead, each drop off location might vary on what is accepted.	<a href="#">Ohio Environmental Protection Agency</a>	Mitchell Mathews <a href="mailto:mitchell.mathews@epa.ohio.gov">mitchell.mathews@epa.ohio.gov</a>
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	<b>Flares <u>not accepted</u> at HHW collection.</b> Contact a licensed commercial <a href="#">TSDF</a> for proper disposal. Call ahead, each drop off location might vary on what is accepted.	<a href="#">Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection</a>	Thomas Mellott <a href="mailto:mtmellott@pa.gov">mtmellott@pa.gov</a>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	Properly dispose of flares at <a href="#">HHW collection facilities</a> or contact a licensed commercial <a href="#">TSD facility</a> for proper disposal. Call ahead, each drop off location might vary on what is accepted.	<a href="#">Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources</a>	Michael Ellenbecker <a href="mailto:michael.ellenbecker@wisconsin.gov">michael.ellenbecker@wisconsin.gov</a>

Sincerely,

K. A. BROYLES  
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard  
Chief, Prevention Division  
By direction