



When you are anchored in a strange harbor it can be nice to know who owns the boat next to you

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### WHOSE BOAT IS THAT?

→ Onboard privacy has changed a lot over the years. Not long ago, the only way to find out who owned the pretty cruising boat that was anchored next to you was to pull out the annual register of boats published by a commercial publishing house. Today, the best and quickest way to learn about the owner of the boat next door, assuming it is a documented vessel, is to check with the Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard maintains the Port State Information Exchange (PSIX) system, described as, "Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) data on U.S. flag vessels, foreign vessels operating in U.S. waters and Coast Guard contacts with those vessels." **You can access and search PSIX data from either a Coast Guard or a National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Web site. The Coast Guard site (cgmix.uscg.mil/PSIX) lets you search for both documented and undocumented vessel information using a range of data including vessel name, vessel ID number (VIN), vessel hull number, vessel call sign and more.**

**The NMFS Web site, on the other hand (www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/CoastGuard), contains only documented vessels—search this site using vessel name or VIN only; however, it also has ownership information including names and addresses.** Additionally, the NMFS Web site often returns the name of the previous owner and any names under which the vessel was previously documented.

If you're thinking about a name for your new boat, you can search the PSIX data and see how many other craft are named *Mimosa*. You can also search the PSIX data to satisfy your curiosity about who owns *Loose Change*, that 82ft ketch that just tied up at the transient slip, or how many other *Fantasia 35s* are out there. (Search the USCG Web site by using the first few hull number characters that are common to all *Fantasia 35s*; put in "%" at the end as a wild card character.) And how about the boat you sold 20 years ago? You can check the databases and find out whether the new owner renamed it *Lousy Luck*. Let's hope not. — MICHAEL ROBERTSON

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