

## WATER-SKIING AND SIMILAR ACTIVITIES

(wake surfing, towing inner tubes, etc.)

- It is unlawful to operate a motorboat at any speed with a person or persons sitting, riding or hanging on a swim platform (*teak surfing*) or swim ladder attached to the motorboat, except when launching, retrieving, docking or anchoring the motorboat.
- In addition to the operator, a competent observer must be in the boat in a position to observe the towed person.
- Skiing is illegal between sunset and sunrise.
- Conventional water-ski tow ropes may not exceed a length of 80 feet.
- It is unlawful to operate a motorboat at any speed when towing a person on water skis or other devices using a tow rope of 20 feet or less.
- Wake surfing is excluded from the 20-foot tow rope requirement.
- Boats engaged in the activity of wake surfing are limited to slow, no-wake speed when within 200 feet of the shoreline, docks, launch ramps, swimmers or downed skiers, persons wading in the water, anchored, moored or drifting boats and other marked areas.
- Motorboats propelled by an outboard motor, inboard/outboard motor or water jet are prohibited from towing a person in or on the wake of the boat (wake surfing).

## EQUIPMENT RECOMMENDED, NOT REQUIRED

• Anchor and line	• Float plan
• Bailing device	• Marine radio
• Boating maps or charts	• Paddles or oars
• Cell phone	

## HAZARDS TO BOATERS

**Dams.** Boats must stay clear of dams. Failure to do so often results in tragedy. Hazards exist both above and below the dam.

State law now requires that many low-head dams in the Commonwealth be marked with signs and, when practical, buoys upstream and downstream. The signs detail restrictions for boating, swimming and wading, and hazards posed by the dam. These restrictions are enforced by Commission Waterways Conservation Officers.

**Strainers.** A tree or tree limb is a typical strainer that can trap and flood boats. Water flows through these obstructions, but solid objects do not. Strainers can pin victims underwater.

**Current.** Never underestimate the power of moving water. A boater who is not sure if his or her boat or ability is up to the prevailing conditions should stay off the water.

**Cold water.** It kills! When boating on cold water, always wear a life jacket, dress in layers, and always tell someone where you are going.

**Submerged objects.** Rocks, stumps, logs and other objects can greatly damage a hull or motor. Keeping a sharp lookout and reducing speed in unfamiliar areas is a good idea.

**Alcohol and boating.** Alcohol use increases the chances of having an accident. Alcohol affects balance, coordination and judgment. It is illegal to operate a boat while under the influence of alcohol or a controlled substance. **Penalties include loss of boating privileges, significant fines and imprisonment.**

**Other boaters.** Steer clear of other boaters, stay alert, keep a sharp lookout and report violations to a Waterways Conservation Officer. Don't assume other operators are paying attention or that they know the rules.

## BOATING ACCIDENTS

Boating accidents must be reported in writing by the boat operator or owner to the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission when:

- A person dies or disappears.
- A person is injured and requires advanced medical treatment beyond first aid.
- Damage to the boat and other property totals more than \$2,000, or there is a complete loss of the vessel.

Boating accident reports can be downloaded from the Commission's website or obtained from any of our regional law enforcement offices.

## SPECIALLY REGULATED WATERS

Additional regulations such as speed limits and slow, no-wake areas affect boaters on specific waterways. Boaters should read all regulations posted on the bulletin boards at access areas. Know the waters you plan to boat before you go.

## REGISTRATION & TITLING

- Boats propelled by machinery must be registered, and they must properly display numbers and a boat registration validation decal. This includes all motorboats regardless of the boat's length and type of motor (includes electric motors).
- Unpowered boats using Commission lakes and access areas or PA State Parks or Forest waterways must be registered OR display a Commission use permit OR display a State Parks launch or mooring permit.
- Boat titles are issued when a boat is sold or when ownership is conveyed. Titles are required for motorboats with a model year of 1997 and newer, except for those that are powered by an outboard motor that are less than 14 feet in length. All 1997 or newer personal watercraft are also subject to the titling requirement. Voluntary titling is available for any other boat.

## PHONE NUMBERS

PA Fish & Boat Commission Boating Course Hotline:

1-888-PAFISH-1 (1-888-723-4741)

Boating Education: 717-705-7833

Law Enforcement: 717-705-7861

Boat Registration:

TOLL FREE 1-866-BOATREG (1-866-262-8734)



## REGIONAL OFFICES

NW 814-337-0444

NC 814-359-5250

NE 570-477-5717

SW 814-445-8974

SC 717-486-7087

SE 717-626-0228



To renew your boat registration  
and purchase fishing licenses, visit:

[www.GoneFishingPa.com](http://www.GoneFishingPa.com)

# 2017

## BOATING REGULATIONS RECAP

A Supplement to the *Boating Handbook*  
Information All Boaters Must Know



The following information includes highlights of laws and regulations that affect recreational boaters in Pennsylvania. This short summary is not intended to be a complete listing of all boating regulations. Consult the

**Pennsylvania Boating Handbook**  
for more detailed information on boating laws and regulations or call the nearest Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission regional law enforcement office.

The Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission's website is the place to go for a wealth of up-to-date information on Pennsylvania fishing and boating programs.

Point your browser to

[www.fishandboat.com](http://www.fishandboat.com)

## MANDATORY BOATING EDUCATION

HP of Motor	Restrictions of Use
PWC*	All PWC (personal watercraft) operators, regardless of age, must have in their possession a Boating Safety Education Certificate. Persons 11 years of age or younger may NOT operate. Persons 12 through 15 years of age may NOT operate with any passengers on board 15 years of age or younger or rent a PWC. *Also known as Jet Skis®, Sea-Doo®, WaveRunners®, TigerShark® and others.
0 - 25 hp	None
Greater than 25 hp	Persons 11 years of age or younger may NOT operate. Persons born on or after January 1, 1982, may not operate unless they have obtained and have in possession a Boating Safety Education Certificate.

## HOW CAN I GET A BOATING SAFETY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE?

To obtain a Boating Safety Education Certificate, boaters must successfully complete an approved boating course (a fee may be charged). Pennsylvania residents must have a certificate issued by the Commission. Approved courses include classroom courses offered by the Commission, the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, the U.S. Power Squadrons and Commission-approved Internet and video correspondence courses.

For boating course opportunities, visit [www.fishandboat.com/Boat/BoatingCourses/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.fishandboat.com/Boat/BoatingCourses/Pages/default.aspx) or call 1-888-PAFISH-1 (1-888-723-4741).

## REQUIRED EQUIPMENT

### PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICES (PFDs)

- A U.S. Coast Guard approved wearable life jacket is required for each person on board. In addition, one throwable device is required on boats 16 feet in length or longer.

- Life jackets must be the appropriate size for the persons wearing them.
- Life jackets must be appropriate for the activity for which they are worn. See the U.S. Coast Guard approval label for information.

- Children 12 years of age and younger must wear an approved life jacket on Commonwealth waters when underway on any boat 20 feet or less in length and in all canoes and kayaks.

- All water skiers and anyone towed behind vessels, personal watercraft operators and passengers and sailboarders must wear a life jacket. Inflatable life jackets are not acceptable for these activities.

- Wearable life jackets must be "readily accessible" or in the open where they can be easily reached. Throwable devices must be "immediately available" or within arm's reach. A PFD stowed in a compartment or sealed in its original packaging is not readily accessible or immediately available.



### MANDATORY COLD WEATHER LIFE JACKET WEAR

- From November 1 through April 30, boaters are required by law to wear life jackets on boats less than 16 feet in length or any canoe or kayak. This regulation went into effect in 2012 and is intended to protect boaters from the dangers of cold water shock if they fall into the water. Recreational boating fatalities that occur in Pennsylvania from November through April are primarily due to the effects of cold water immersion. When water temperatures are less than 70 degrees F, cold water shock is a major factor in boating fatalities. Victims who wear

a life jacket when exposed to cold water have potentially life-saving advantages such as insulation from the cold, buoyancy for victims who are unable to tread water and reduced risk of aspiration of water. In an effort to reduce the number of fatalities related to cold water immersion, the Commission has amended regulations to require life jackets to be worn on small and unstable boats during the period most noted for cold water temperatures.

## LIGHTS

- All vessels must show required running lights between sunset and sunrise and during periods of restricted visibility. Check the *Pennsylvania Boating Handbook* for details.
- All boats must display anchor lights when they are anchored on any boatable Commonwealth waters (except in special anchorage areas).
- Unpowered boats must display a white light either handheld or installed in time to avoid a collision.

## FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

- Coast Guard-approved fire extinguishers must be carried on all motorboats 26 feet or more in length.
- Motorboats less than 26 feet in length with gasoline engines are required to carry a fire extinguisher if they have one or more of the following: closed compartments, permanently installed fuel tanks, double bottoms not sealed to the hull or completely filled with flotation materials, closed living spaces or closed storage compartments in which flammable materials are stowed. Note: Open boats such as jonboats where an after-market solid wood or metal floor is installed and is not completely sealed to the hull are **NOT** required to carry a fire extinguisher.
- Fire extinguishers must be installed so that they are immediately available, within arm's reach of the operator or passengers on board.
- Fire extinguishers must be maintained and fully charged.

## CARBURETOR BACKFIRE FLAME CONTROL

- Gasoline engines, except outboards, must have an approved (USCG, SAE or UL) backfire flame control on the carburetor to prevent ignition of gasoline vapors in case the engine backfires.

## SOUND-PRODUCING DEVICES

- Motorboats less than 40 feet in length must carry some means of making an efficient sound signal audible for 1/2 mile. This device may be hand-, mouth- or power-operated. An athletic coach's whistle is an acceptable sound-producing device for small motorboats.
- Operators of unpowered boats (canoes, kayaks, rowboats, paddleboards) are required to carry a device capable of sounding a prolonged blast for 4-6 seconds that can be heard by another boat operator in time to avoid a collision. An athletic coach's whistle is an acceptable sound-producing device.
- Sound signaling devices must be readily accessible to the operator of the boat or passengers.

## VISUAL DISTRESS SIGNALS (VDS)

- Visual distress signals are required for boats operating on Lake Erie.
- Visual distress signals must be U.S. Coast Guard approved, have legible approval numbers, be in serviceable condition and be readily accessible. An expiration date must be stamped on flares.

## MUFFLING DEVICES

- Boat motors must be equipped with an efficient muffling system or device in good working order. Cut-out devices are illegal in Pennsylvania.

- Boat exhaust systems may not be modified in any manner that reduces or eliminates the effectiveness of the muffler or muffler system.

## MARINE SANITATION DEVICES (MSD)

- MSDs must be installed on all vessels with installed toilet systems. They must be U.S. Coast Guard approved.
- Types I and II MSDs are approved for use on Lake Erie, the Delaware River, the Three Rivers area and other flow-through waters. Type III holding tanks are required only on non-navigable waters. Discharge of sewage is prohibited in all Commonwealth waters.

## OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

### *It is illegal to:*

- operate a boat at greater than slow, no-wake speed within 100 feet of the shoreline, docks, launch ramps, swimmers, downed skiers, persons wading in the water, anchored, moored or drifting boats and floats or in areas marked with "slow, no wake" buoys.
- operate faster than slow, no wake when within 100 feet to the rear or 50 feet to the side of another boat that is underway, unless in a narrow channel.
- operate within 100 feet of any person towed behind another boat.
- cause a boat to become airborne or to leave the water completely while crossing another boat's wake when within 100 feet of the boat creating the wake.
- operate a watercraft in a reckless, negligent or dangerous manner.
- Boats must be operated at a rate of speed that does not endanger the life or property of any person.
- fail to keep a proper lookout or fail to maintain a safe speed, so that the boat operator cannot take proper and effective action to avoid a collision.
- weave through congested traffic.
- operate a motorboat less than 20 feet in length at greater than slow, no-wake speed while a person is standing on or in the boat.
- operate a motorboat at greater than slow, no-wake speed with a person riding outside of the passenger carrying area or while a person is riding on the bow decking, gunwales, transom or motor covers.
- tow more than one person at a time behind a PWC or tow anyone behind a PWC with a capacity of two persons or fewer.
- operate a pontoon boat while a person is riding outside the passenger-carrying area.
- operate a PWC from sunset to sunrise.
- operate or be a passenger on a PWC without wearing a life jacket.
- operate a PWC without having in your possession a boating safety education certification.
- operate a boat using docking lights while underway, except when docking and the boat is traveling at slow, no-wake speed and is within 100 feet of approaching a dock, a mooring buoy or the shoreline. A docking light is a flood or spotlight type of light permanently installed or permanently mounted on a motorboat that is used to illuminate a boat's forward course of travel.

## PADDLESPORTS

Canoeists, kayakers and paddleboarders must adhere to life jacket, sound-producing device and registration/launch permit requirements. A white light either hand-held or installed is to be displayed in time to avoid a collision.

## PADDLING TIPS

- Expect to get wet/ dress properly
- Never boat alone
- Prepare for the weather
- Leave a float plan
- Prepare to swim
- Scout ahead
- Wear your life jacket