



Massachusetts Boating Law

The following summary highlights important Massachusetts boating laws.

Minimum Age Restrictions. No person under 12 years of age may operate a motorboat, unless accompanied on-board and directly supervised by a competent person 18 years of age or older. Personal watercraft (PWC) users must be at least 16 years of age in order to operate, with no exceptions.

Safety Education Certification. Youth 12 through 15 years of age must complete an approved basic boating course in order to operate a motorboat without adult supervision. Upon successful completion of such a course, students are issued a state "Boating Safety Certificate" which must be in the possession of the operator when underway. Personal watercraft users who are 16 or 17 years of age must also complete such a boating course. Youth under 16 years of age are not allowed to operate personal watercraft.

Accident Reporting. The operator of any motorboat involved in an accident which results in personal injury, death, or property damage (over \$500) shall immediately notify the state environmental police and file the appropriate accident report within the required time frame. (2 days-fatality; 5 days - all other accidents)

Safety Equipment. Most state equipment carriage requirements are identical to federal laws. This primary list includes life preservers, fire extinguishers, sound-signaling devices, visual distress signals, and navigation lights. In Massachusetts, life preservers are required to be worn by: (1) youth less than 12 years of age (2) personal watercraft users (3) water-skiers (4) canoeists/kayakers from September 15 through May 15. A boat owner or operator is responsible to ensure that passengers on-board wear life preservers as required. Additionally, the state requires that all motorboats (with the exception of personal watercraft) be equipped with an anchor, manual bailer, and line. A paddle or an oar is required on boats less than 16 feet in length. Motorboats towing skiers must also be equipped with a boarding ladder. Registration and numbering of all boats powered by any type of machinery is required.

Prohibited Operation. The following types of boat operation are extremely hazardous and are prohibited:

- Operating any vessel under the influence of alcohol or drugs. A blood alcohol concentration of 0.08 or greater is considered boating while intoxicated in Massachusetts. Penalties are substantial and could result in the loss of your motor vehicle driver's license.
- Operating a motorboat within 150 feet of a swimming area, whether public or private.
- Operating at an excessive speed considering weather conditions, boat traffic, and other hazards. For inland waters, operating at a speed greater than 45 m.p.h. is always considered excessive.
- Operating a motorboat without properly working lights or while water-skiing/jet-skiing during the nighttime.
- Operating at greater than headway speed (6 mph or less) when within 150 feet of a swimmer, water-skier, mooring area, marina, or boat launch. Also, when the operator's vision is obscured in any way.
- Operating in an overloaded condition - carrying total weight that exceeds capacity plate recommendations or is excessive considering water conditions, and bow-riding, unless the motorboat has adequate guardrails.

Personal Watercraft Operation. Personal watercraft are considered "motorboats" by law and thus must comply with all boating laws and navigation rules, including speed and operation rules. Additionally, pwc users must adhere to state regulations specific to pwc operation (see web page below).

This is only a summary of boating laws as of August, 2008. You must know and observe all local, state, and federal laws. For further information on boating laws or boating education contact Massachusetts Environmental Police at 508-759-0002, or visit our website at:

<http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dle/BoatRVSafe.htm>

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BOAT SMART FROM THE START - WEAR YOUR LIFEJACKET !!