

Mandatory Education and Age Requirements:



In South Carolina, boaters 16 years of age and older may operate any recreational boat or PWC without restrictions. However, persons under the age of 16 must complete a boating course approved by the SCDNR in order to operate a motorboat or PWC with a 15 horsepower motor or greater.

The only exception for those under the age of 15 who have not completed an approved boating safety course is when they are accompanied by an adult not under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Specifically, parents/guardians are responsible for the actions of persons under their care and supervision, and must not allow a child to illegally operate a boat or PWC.

Not all non-proctored courses (including the BoatU.S. Foundation for Boating Safety Course) are accepted for certification.

[Back to top](#)

[Online Course Study Topics](#)

Reckless & Negligent Operation:

No person shall operate any vessel or manipulate water skis or similar towed devices in a reckless or negligent manner. The failure to exercise the degree of care necessary to prevent endangering life, limb, or property is considered reckless and negligent.

Some activities considered negligent or reckless operation in Mississippi:

- Speeding in no-wake zones or boating in areas marked as restricted.
- Operating at excessive speed in congested areas and at times of restricted visibility.
- Failure to maintain a proper lookout for other boats or persons at all times.
- Operating under the influence of alcohol or narcotics.
- Jumping the wake within 200 feet of another vessel.
- Operating a ski boat or towing a passenger in reckless manner or to cause the skier and towline to pass through a restricted area such as one designated for swimming.
- Buzzing or spraying another boat or swimmer is illegal.
- Allowing a passenger to ride on the gunwale, bow, seatbacks, transom or in any other position obviously dangerous may be considered negligent operation.
- Maneuvering your boat recklessly in the vicinity of other boaters, the shoreline, or those who are at anchor or are engaged in swimming, fishing or diving.
- Obstructing another boat from maneuvering or passing safely or swerving at the last moment to avoid collision.
- Chasing, harassing or disturbing wildlife.

Additional laws that apply to personal watercraft (PWC):



- A PWC may not be operated between sunset and sunrise.
- All personal watercraft must be equipped with a self-circling device or an emergency engine cut off lanyard that is properly attached to the operator during operation.
- A PWC must not be operated at a speed greater than necessary to maintain steerage within 50 feet of a non-moving boat, a pier, bridge or person in the water.
- A PWC must not be operated so it creates a dangerous situation when passing or jumping over another boater's wake.

[Back to top](#)

Boat Speed Limits:



Boat speed limits are regulated by law for certain areas and conditions. When no speed limit is posted, operate your boat so that it will not endanger others or cause injury, damage, or unnecessary inconvenience. Always keep a proper lookout and never load a boat with passengers or cargo beyond its safe carrying capacity.

- White buoys or signs with red markings and black letters will indicate speed limits and no wake zones.
- In South Carolina, "Idle Speed" or "No Wake Speed" is defined as a speed not greater than that which is necessary to maintain steerage.
- If operating your boat or PWC in a no-wake zone and you cause damage to another person's boat or property, you are responsible. Proceed slowly in these areas.
- Boats and PWCs may not be operated in excess of idle speed within 50 feet of a moored or anchored boat, a wharf, pier or dock, or a person in the water.
- Boats and PWCs must not be operated at a greater than idle speed within 100 yards of the Atlantic coastline.
- In times of restricted visibility such as in fog, stormy conditions or nighttime operation, you must be able to stop your vessel within half the distance of forward visibility.
- At all times, operators must be prepared to avoid a collision and have engines ready for immediate maneuvering.

[Back to top](#)

Special Activities Restrictions and Considerations:

Many states regulate certain water sports activities such as waterskiing, diving and hunting from a vessel. For your safety, and for those who may be in the water, you should learn and abide by these special laws.



Special Activities, Restrictions & Requirements:

- Boaters (and PWC operators) engaged in towing a water skier or similar device must have an observer other than the boat operator or a rearview mirror to observe the towed person.
- When towing a water skier or similar device behind a PWC, it must be rated for at least 2 persons. If using an observer, the PWC must be rated for 3 people to accommodate the retrieved skier.
- When loaning your motorboat or PWC, be certain that they have met the minimum age and education requirements and understand all applicable South Carolina laws.
- When towing a person on water skis or similar device, the participant must wear a properly fitting Type I, II, III or V PFD. Inflatable life jackets and ski belts are not approved.
- It is illegal to buzz or spray another boat or swimmer with water skis, aquaplane or similar device.
- It is illegal for boats or PWCs to tow skiers or any similar device between sunset and sunrise.
- Vessels engaged in scuba diving and snorkeling should display a red and white diver down flag measuring at least 15x15 inches to mark their diving area. Other boats must not come closer than 50 feet to the flag unless they have permission of the person who posted the flag.
- Vessels engaged in diving activity and are restricted in their ability to maneuver, must hoist a blue and white *alfa* flag when conducting operations in federal or international waters.

[Back to top](#)

Operating Under the Influence

Operating a boat while intoxicated is a federal offense and is subject to a \$1,000 fine. State Boating Under the Influence (BUI) laws are becoming more stringent. As on the roadways, on-water enforcement officers may administer sobriety tests and conduct a blood alcohol content (BAC) examination.



In South Carolina

- No person shall operate any vessel, personal watercraft, water skis or similar device while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Boaters who have a BAC of 0.08% or greater are considered intoxicated.
- Boaters who have a BAC between 0.05% and 0.08% used in combination with other sobriety tests or evidence may be considered intoxicated.
- By operating a boat in the waters of South Carolina, you have consented to a chemical test to determine BAC level.
- South Carolina law prescribes fines and jail times for those who violate state BUI laws. Offenders may be suspended from operating any water device for up to 2 years and may be required to enroll and successfully complete an Alcohol and Drug Safety Action Course as well as an approved South Carolina Boating Safety course.

[Back to top](#)

Officer Authority, Compliance & Assistance

In South Carolina, law enforcement officers of the SCDNR have the authority to stop and/or inspect vessels to enforce South Carolina and federal boating laws. The United States Coast Guard has enforcement authority on federally controlled waters.



SCDNR officers the have the authority to stop and/or inspect vessels!

These officers also have the authority to terminate voyages, escort boaters ashore, or order boaters to the nearest moorage if an unsafe condition is found that cannot be corrected on the spot.

Boat operators must immediately yield and reduce speed when being overtaken, approached or directed by a law enforcement official operating a siren and/or displaying an illuminated blue light. When operating in an area of law enforcement activity, you must reduce speed and give a wide berth until beyond the area of operation of the law enforcement vessel.

[Back to top](#)

Accident Reporting Requirements



Anyone involved in a boating accident is required to stop and give assistance as long as it will not personally endanger the operator, passengers or vessel. Anyone involved in a boating accident that results in the death or disappearance of a person must make an immediate verbal notification to SCDNR (800) 922-5241. Be prepared to provide your name, address and vessel registration numbers to authorities and all other involved parties. A written report is also required within 48 hours.

In addition, if a person loses consciousness as a result of a boating accident, or needs medical treatment that extends beyond 24 hours, the boat operator must make a written report to the SCDNR within 48 hours. And, when property damage exceeds \$500 as a result of a boating accident, a report is also required within 48 hours of the occurrence.

Boating Accident Report Forms may be obtained from any SCDNR law enforcement officer.

Mail completed reports to:
SCDNR Division of Law Enforcement
Investigation and Education
POB 12559
Charleston, SC 29422-2559

[Back to top](#)



Other State Boating Laws

Often times counties, cities and districts within a state will have different, more restrictive laws. Boating laws are subject to change and it is your responsibility to be informed of the law as it applies to you and your on-water activities. To be absolutely certain about specific boating laws in your state it is wise to contact your state boating agency.

It is Your Responsibility – Be Informed!