Colorado: The Legal Requirements of Boating

Your Vessel’s Registration

◆ Requirements for vessel registration vary from state to state. In Colorado, you must have a Colorado Boat Registration and expiration date decals to operate a vessel legally on Colorado’s public waters. Exceptions to registration are:
  • Vessels without any kind of motor or a sail
  • Vessels properly registered in another state and using Colorado waters for 60 or fewer consecutive days
  • Vessels documented with the U.S. Coast Guard

◆ The Boat Registration and expiration date decals are obtained by submitting the proper application form and fee to Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Registration Unit, 13787 S. Hwy. 85, Littleton, CO 80125.

◆ The Boat Registration (pocket-sized card) must be on board and available for inspection by an enforcement officer whenever the vessel is operated.

◆ The vessel number and expiration date decals must be displayed as follows.
  • Number must be painted, decaled, or otherwise affixed to each side of the bow on the forward half of the vessel, placed to be clearly visible.
  • Number must read from left to right on both sides of the vessel.
  • Number must be in bold, BLOCK letters, at least 3 inches high (excluding border or trim).
  • Number’s color must contrast with its background.
  • Letters must be separated from the numbers by a space or hyphen: CL 3717 ZW or CL-3717-ZW.
  • No other numbers may be displayed on either side of the bow.
  • Expiration date decals must be affixed on each side of the vessel two inches to the left of the registration number.

◆ If your vessel requires registration, it is illegal to operate it or allow others to operate your vessel unless it is registered and numbered as described above.

Other Facts About Registering and Titling Your Vessel

◆ A Boat Registration is valid for one year and expires on December 31 of each year. Owners of vessels that have already been registered will be sent a renewal notice to their residence.

◆ Colorado Parks and Wildlife must be notified within 15 days of the sale, trade, or transfer of ownership of a registered vessel.

◆ The owner of a registered vessel must notify Colorado Parks and Wildlife within 15 days if the vessel is abandoned, destroyed, lost, or stolen; the registration issued for the vessel must be surrendered.

◆ When the owner of a registered vessel changes address from that shown on the registration, he or she must notify the Colorado Parks and Wildlife within 15 days of the change.

◆ If you lose or destroy your Boat Registration or decals, you must apply for a duplicate within 15 days in writing and submit a processing fee.

◆ Canoes, kayaks, sailboards, or non-motorized rafts, which are not required to be registered, must be marked clearly with the owner’s name and current address in a place on the vessel where it will be clearly visible.

◆ Larger recreational vessels, owned by U.S. citizens may (at the option of the owner) be documented by the U.S. Coast Guard. Call the USCG at 1-800-799-8362 for more information.
Hull Identification Number

- The Hull Identification Number (HIN) is a unique 12-digit number assigned by the manufacturer to vessels built after 1972.
- Hull Identification Numbers:
  - Distinguish one vessel from another—the same as serial numbers distinguish one car from another.
  - Are engraved in the fiberglass or on a metal plate permanently attached to the transom.
- You should write down your HIN and put it in a place separate from your vessel in case warranty problems arise or your vessel is stolen.

Who May Operate a Vessel

The following operator age and boater education requirements apply to operation of vessels on Colorado's public waters.

- **A person under 14 years of age** may not operate any motorboat or personal watercraft on Colorado's public waters.
- **A person 14 or 15 years of age** may operate a motorboat or personal watercraft on Colorado's public waters **only if** he or she:
  - Has passed a boating safety course approved by Colorado Parks and Wildlife and ...
  - Has in his or her possession a Boating Safety Certificate issued by the boating safety course provider.
- **A person 16 years of age or older** may operate a motorboat or personal watercraft on Colorado's public waters.
- It is illegal to permit or knowingly allow a motorboat or personal watercraft to be operated in violation of the age and boater education requirements above.
- It is illegal for a vessel livery to rent or lease a motorboat or personal watercraft to any person who does not meet the age and boater education requirements above.

Registration Questions?
Call Colorado Parks and Wildlife Boat Registration hotline at 303-791-1920 or visit our website at www.cpw.state.co.us/boating

Colorado Boating Safety Course

Photograph has successfully completed the

Boating Safety Certificate

Operators required to have a Boating Safety Certificate must carry a wallet-sized certification card on board the vessel.
Unlawful Operation of a Vessel

Colorado law states that these dangerous operating practices are illegal.

◆ **Careless or Imprudent Operation** of a vessel is operating in a reckless, careless, or unsafe manner that causes danger to any person, property, or wildlife. Examples of careless or imprudent operation include:
  - Becoming airborne or completely leaving the water while crossing the wake of another vessel at an unsafe distance from the vessel creating the wake or when visibility is obstructed
  - Weaving through congested waterway traffic
  - Operating such that your vessel or another vessel must swerve abruptly or cut speed abruptly in order to avoid collision
  - Failing to follow the navigation rules
  - Entering a marked swimming area with a vessel
  - Operating such that your vessel collides with another vessel, object, or person
  - Chasing or harassing wildlife with your vessel

◆ **Improper Speed or Distance** is not maintaining a proper speed and/or distance while operating a vessel. Specifically, the following acts are illegal.
  - Operating a vessel at a distance from other vessels or at a speed that exceeds safe and reasonable limits given the waterway traffic, marked speed limits, weather, and other boating conditions
  - Operating a vessel at greater than 40 miles per hour, except during authorized marine events
  - Operating a vessel at greater than "slow, no wake speed" in any posted “no wake” zone
  - Operating a vessel at greater than “slow, no wake speed” within 150 feet of:
    - Any swimming area
    - A moored vessel
    - A person in a vessel engaged in servicing buoys or markers
  - Operating or anchoring a vessel within 150 feet of any person fishing on shore, except where narrow passages or coves make keeping this distance from shore impractical
  - Operating a vessel so that the vessel or its wake endangers or interferes with any person or property

◆ **Riding on the Bow or Gunwales** is allowing motorboat passengers to ride on the bow decking, **gunwales**, or any other position where there is a danger of falling **overboard**. These restrictions do not apply when the motorboat is being moored or anchored.

◆ **Overloading or Overpowering** is loading or powering the vessel beyond the safe load and power limits, taking into consideration the weather and other operating conditions. The safe load and power limits for most vessels are shown on the capacity plate installed by the vessel manufacturer (see Chapter 2).
Colorado law prohibits anyone from boating under the influence (BUI)—that is, operating any vessel propelled by a motor or sail, including all paddlecraft, or manipulating water skis, aquaplanes, or similar devices, while under the influence of alcohol, a controlled substance, any drugs, or any combination of these substances.

Alcohol and drugs cause impaired balance, blurred vision, poor coordination, impaired judgment, and slower reaction time. Alcohol is a major contributor to boating accidents and fatalities. Read more about the effects and risks of consuming alcohol in Chapter 5.

- **Colorado law states that a person is considered to be boating under the influence (BUI) if he or she:**
  - Has a blood or breath alcohol concentration of 0.08% or greater
  - Is under the influence of alcohol
  - Is under the influence of any controlled substance, any other drug, or any combination of these substances that renders him or her incapable of operating safely.

- The penalty for a first conviction of boating under the influence is mandatory jail time of at least 5 days, not to exceed 180 days. A fine of $100 to $1,000 also may be added by the court but is not mandatory. The convicted person also will lose operating privileges for three months.

- By operating a vessel on Colorado waters, you have given “implied” consent to alcohol testing if directed by an arresting officer having reasonable grounds to believe that you are boating under the influence. Refusal to submit to alcohol testing will be admissible into evidence at trial.

- It is illegal for the owner or operator of a motorboat or sailboat to knowingly permit the vessel to be operated by someone under the influence of alcohol, a controlled substance, any drug, or any combination of these substances that renders that person incapable of safely operating the vessel.

**Obstructing Navigation**

Vessel operators should always be considerate of other vessel operators even when stopping to anchor or moor. Keep in mind that it is illegal to:

- Operate any vessel in such a way that it will interfere unnecessarily with the safe navigation of other vessels on the waterway.
- Anchor a vessel in the traveled portion of a river or channel in a way that will prevent or interfere with any other vessel passing through the same area.
- Moor or attach a vessel to a buoy (other than a mooring buoy), beacon, light, or any other navigational aid placed on public waters by proper authorities.
- Move, displace, tamper with, damage, or destroy any navigational aid.
- Obstruct a pier, wharf, boat ramp, or access to any facility.

**Homeland Security Restrictions**

Recreational boaters have a role in keeping our waterways safe and secure.

- Violators of the restrictions below can expect a quick and severe response.
  - Do not approach within 100 yards and slow to minimum speed within 500 yards of any U.S. Naval vessel. If you need to pass within 100 yards of a U.S. Naval vessel for safe passage, you must contact the U.S. Naval vessel or the U.S. Coast Guard escort vessel on VHF-FM channel 16.
  - Observe and avoid all security zones. Avoid commercial port operation areas, especially those that involve military, cruise-line, or petroleum facilities.
  - Observe and avoid other restricted areas near dams, power plants, etc.
  - Do not stop or anchor beneath bridges or in the channel.
  - Keep a sharp eye out for anything that looks peculiar or out of the ordinary.
  - Report all activities that seem suspicious to the local authorities, the U.S. Coast Guard, or the port or marina security.

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**Areas of Impairment Due to Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concentration</th>
<th>Area of Impairment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>Coordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>Tracking and steering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>Information processing, judgment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>Eye movement control, steadiness, emergency responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>Divided attention, reaction time, visual function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>Concentrated attention, speed control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>BAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Avoid all security zones and restricted areas. Keep a sharp eye out for anything that looks peculiar or out of the ordinary.

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The best thing you can do for your safety and the safety of your passengers and other boaters is simple ... **Don’t Drink and Boat!**
Personal Flotation Devices (Life Jackets)

All vessels must be equipped with U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jackets, called personal flotation devices (PFDs). The quantity and type depend on the length of your vessel and the number of people on board and/or being towed. Each PFD must be in good condition, be the proper size for the intended wearer, and very importantly, be readily accessible! Readily accessible means you must be able to put the PFD on in a reasonable amount of time in an emergency (vessel sinking, on fire, etc.). PFDs should not be stowed in plastic bags or in locked or closed compartments, and they should not have other gear stowed on top of them.

Vessel operators should ask everyone on their vessel to wear a PFD whenever on the water. PFDs can save lives, but only if they are worn!

PFD Requirements

• All vessels must have at least one USCG–approved Type I, II, or III PFD (life jacket) for each person on board.

• In addition to the above requirement, one Type IV (throwable) USCG–approved PFD must be on board vessels 16 feet or longer.

• Each child under 13 years of age must wear a USCG–approved PFD while on board any vessel that has entered the water unless the child is below deck or in an enclosed cabin.

• Each person being towed behind a vessel on water skis, an aquaplane, or similar device must wear a properly fitting flotation device.

• All persons on board a personal watercraft (PWC) must wear a USCG–approved Type I, II, or III PFD.

• Sailboarders may wear a neoprene wetsuit capable of providing flotation instead of a PFD.

• River-running vessels must have a USCG–approved Type I, II, III, or V Whitewater River Running Buoyant Vest for each person on board. A Type IV PFD is not required for these vessels.

• Inflatable PFDs may be used only by persons 16 years old or older.

PFD Descriptions

**TYPE I: Offshore Life Jackets**

These vests are geared for rough or remote waters where rescue may take awhile. They provide the most buoyancy, are excellent for flotation, and will turn most unconscious persons face up in the water.

**TYPE II: Near-Shore Vests**

These vests are good for calm waters when quick assistance or rescue is likely. Type II vests will turn some unconscious wearers face up in the water, but the turning is not as pronounced as with a Type I.

**TYPE III: Flotation Aids**

These vests or full-sleeved jackets are good for calm waters when quick assistance or rescue is likely. They are not for rough waters since they will not turn most unconscious persons face up. Type III PFDs are used for water sports such as water-skiing. Some Type III PFDs are designed to inflate when you enter the water.

**TYPE IV: Throwable Devices/Not Wearable**

These cushions and ring buoys are designed to be thrown to someone in trouble. Since a Type IV PFD is not designed to be worn, it is neither for rough waters nor for persons who are unable to hold onto it.

**TYPE V: Special-Use Devices**

These vests, deck suits, hybrid PFDs, and others are designed for specific activities such as windsurfing, kayaking, or water-skiing. Some Type V PFDs are designed to inflate when you enter the water. To be acceptable, Type V PFDs must be used in accordance with their label.

Types of Personal Flotation Devices

Read and follow the label restrictions on all PFDs.
Fire Extinguishers

- Extinguishers are classified by a letter and number symbol. The number indicates the relative size of the extinguisher, and the letter indicates the type of fire it will extinguish.
  - Type A fires are of combustible solids like wood.
  - Type B fires are of flammable liquids like gasoline or oil.
  - Type C fires are electrical fires.
- All vessels, including PWCs, are required to have a Type B fire extinguisher(s) on board if one or more of the following conditions exist:
  - Inboard engine
  - Closed compartments where portable fuel tanks may be stored
  - Double-bottoms not sealed to the hull or which are not completely filled with flotation material
  - Closed living spaces
  - Closed storage compartments in which flammable or combustible materials may be stored
  - Permanently installed fuel tanks
- Approved types of fire extinguishers are identified by the following marking on the label—“Marine Type USCG Approved”—followed by the type and size symbols and the approval number.

Use this chart to determine the type and quantity of fire extinguishers required for your vessel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Vessel</th>
<th>Without Fixed System</th>
<th>With Fixed System*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 26 feet</td>
<td>one B-I</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 feet to less than 40 feet</td>
<td>two B-I or one B-II</td>
<td>one B-I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 feet to less than 65 feet</td>
<td>three B-I or one B-II and one B-I</td>
<td>two B-I or one B-II</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* refers to a permanently installed fire extinguisher system

- Extinguishers should be placed in an accessible area—not near the engine or in a compartment, but where they can be reached immediately. Be sure you know how to operate them.
- Fire extinguishers must be maintained in usable condition. Inspect extinguishers regularly to ensure the following:
  - Seals and tamper indicators are not broken or missing.
  - Pressure gauges or indicators read in the operable range.
  - There is no physical damage, corrosion, leakage, or clogged nozzles.
Backfire Flame Arrestors

Because boat engines may backfire, all powerboats (except outboards) that are fueled with gasoline must have an approved backfire flame arrestor on each carburetor. Backfire flame arrestors are designed to prevent the ignition of gasoline vapors in case the engine backfires.

- Backfire flame arrestors must be:
  - In good and serviceable condition
  - U.S. Coast Guard-approved (must comply with SAE J-1928 or UL 1111 standards)
- Periodically clean the flame arrestor(s) and check for any damage.

Ventilation Systems

Ventilation systems are crucial. Their purpose is to avoid explosions by removing flammable gases. Properly installed ventilation systems greatly reduce the chance of a life-threatening explosion.

- All gasoline-powered vessels, constructed in a way that would entrap fumes, must have at least two ventilation ducts fitted with cowl(s) to remove the fumes. At least one exhaust duct must extend from the open atmosphere to the lower bilge. At least one intake duct must extend from a point at least midway to the bilge or below the level of the carburetor air intake.
- If your vessel is equipped with a power ventilation system, turn it on for at least four minutes in either of these situations:
  - After fueling
  - Before starting the engine
- If your vessel is not equipped with a power ventilation system (for example, a personal watercraft), open the engine compartment and sniff for gasoline fumes before starting the engine.

Mufflers and Noise Level Limits

Vessel operators may not hear sound signals or voices if the engine is not adequately muffled.

- All vessels propelled by gas, gasoline, or naphtha must be manufactured with an underwater exhaust or other device capable of adequately muffling the sounds of the engine exhaust. That is, the engine's exhaust must be muffled or suppressed at all times so as not to create excessive noise.
- No person may operate a vessel on Colorado waters that emits noise in excess of 86 decibels on the “A” weighted scale when measured from a distance of 50 feet or more from the vessel.
- Vessels involved in a marine event authorized by the Colorado Parks and Wildlife or U.S. Coast Guard are exempt from the requirements above.
Vessel operators must make sure that their vessels are equipped with the proper navigation lights and use the lights during these conditions:
- When away from the dock between sunset and sunrise
- During periods of restricted visibility such as fog or heavy rain
- The different types of navigation lights are described in “Navigation Lights” in Chapter 3. No other lights that may be mistaken for required navigation lights may be exhibited. Note: Blue or red flashing lights are restricted to use by law enforcement vessels only.
- The required navigation lights differ depending on the type and size of your vessel. The common lighting configurations for recreational vessels are discussed below. For other configurations and requirements for larger vessels, see the U.S. Coast Guard’s Navigation Rules.

### Power-Driven Vessels Less Than 65.6 Feet Long When Underway
If less than 65.6 feet (20 meters) long, these vessels must exhibit the lights as shown in illustration 1. Remember, power-driven vessels include sailboats operating under engine power. The required lights are:
- Red and green sidelights visible from a distance of at least two miles away—or if less than 39.4 feet (12 meters) long, at least one mile away—on a dark, clear night.
- An all-round white light (if less than 39.4 feet long) or both a masthead light and a sternlight. These lights must be visible from a distance of at least two miles away on a dark, clear night. The all-round white light (or the masthead light) must be at least 3.3 feet (one meter) higher than the sidelights.

### Unpowered Vessels When Underway
Unpowered vessels are sailing vessels or vessels that are paddled, poled, or rowed.
- If less than 65.6 feet long, these vessels must exhibit the lights as shown in illustration 2. The required lights are:
  - Red and green sidelights visible from a distance of at least two miles away—or if less than 39.4 feet long, at least one mile away—on a dark, clear night.
  - A sternlight visible from a distance of at least two miles away.
- If less than 23.0 feet (7 meters) long, these vessels should:
  - If practical, exhibit the same lights as required for unpowered vessels less than 65.6 feet in length.
  - If not practical, have on hand at least one lantern or flashlight shining a white light as shown in illustration 3.

### All Vessels When Not Underway
All vessels are required to display a white light visible for two miles in all directions whenever they are moored or anchored outside a designated mooring area between sunset and sunrise.

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1. **Power-Driven Vessels Less Than 65.6 Feet**

2. **Unpowered Vessels Less Than 65.6 Feet**

3. **Unpowered Vessels Less Than 23 Feet**
Visual Distress Signals

Visual Distress Signals (VDSs) allow vessel operators to signal for help in the event of an emergency. VDSs are classified as day signals (visible in bright sunlight), night signals (visible at night), or both day and night signals. VDSs are either pyrotechnic (smoke and flames) or non-pyrotechnic (non-combustible).

- Vessels on **federally controlled waters** must be equipped with U.S. Coast Guard–approved visual distress signals. All vessels, regardless of length or type, are required to carry night signals when operating between sunset and sunrise. Most vessels must carry day signals also; exceptions to the requirement for day signals are:
  - Recreational vessels that are less than 16 feet in length
  - Non-motorized open sailboats that are less than 26 feet in length
  - Manually propelled vessels
- VDSs must be U.S. Coast Guard–approved, in serviceable condition, and readily accessible.

**Pyrotechnic Visual Distress Signals**
- Orange Smoke—Handheld
- Orange Smoke—Floating
  - Day Signal
- Red Meteor
  - Day and Night Signal
- Red Flare
  - Day and Night Signal

**Non-Pyrotechnic Visual Distress Signals**
- Electric Light
  - Night Signal
- Orange Flag
  - Day Signal

- If pyrotechnic VDSs are used, a minimum of three must be carried in the vessel. Also, pyrotechnic VDSs must be dated and may not be carried past their expiration date.
- The following combinations of signals are examples of VDSs that could be carried on board to satisfy U.S. Coast Guard requirements:
  - Three handheld red flares (day and night)
  - One handheld red flare and two red meteors (day and night)
  - One handheld orange smoke signal (day), two floating orange smoke signals (day), and one electric light (night only)
- It is prohibited to display visual distress signals while on the water unless assistance is required to prevent immediate or potential danger to persons on board a vessel.

**Pyrotechnic Devices**
- Pyrotechnics are excellent distress signals. However, there is potential for injury and property damage if not handled properly. These devices produce a very hot flame, and the residue can cause burns and ignite flammable materials.
- Pistol-launched and handheld parachute flares and meteors have many characteristics of a firearm and must be handled with caution. In some states, they are considered a firearm and are prohibited from use.
- Pyrotechnic devices should be stored in a cool, dry, and prominently marked location.

**Non-Pyrotechnic Devices**
- The distress flag is a day signal only. It must be at least 3 x 3 feet with a black square and ball on an orange background.
- The electric distress light is accepted for night use only and must flash the international SOS distress signal automatically.

**Arm Signal**
Although this signal does not meet VDS equipment requirements, wave your arms to summon help if you do not have other distress signals on board.

**federally controlled waters**
Waters on which vessels must observe federal requirements, including VDS requirements; these waters include:
- Coastal waters
- The Great Lakes
- Territorial seas
- Bodies of water connected directly to one of the above, up to a point where the body of water is less than two miles wide
Common Sound Signals

Some common sound signals that you should be familiar with as a recreational boater are as follows.

Changing Direction
- **One short blast** tells other boaters “I intend to pass you on my port (left) side.”
- **Two short blasts** tell other boaters “I intend to pass you on my starboard (right) side.”
- **Three short blasts** tell other boaters “I am backing up.”

Restricted Visibility
- **One prolonged blast** at intervals of not more than two minutes is the signal used by power-driven vessels when underway.
- **One prolonged blast plus two short blasts** at intervals of not more than two minutes is the signal used by sailing vessels.

Warning
- **One prolonged blast** is a warning signal (for example, used when coming around a blind bend or exiting a slip).
- **Five (or more) short, rapid blasts** signal danger or signal that you do not understand or disagree with the other boater’s intentions.

Diver-Down Flags:
- Persons scuba diving, skin diving, or snorkeling must display a red and white divers flag at or near the point of submergence that is capable of being identified from at least 100 yards. Divers or snorkelers must stay within 100 feet of their flag. Vessels not engaged in diving operations must stay at least 100 feet away from a displayed diver-down flag. Two types of flags indicate diving activity.
  - A rectangular red flag with a white diagonal stripe must be attached to a vessel, float, or buoy if on Colorado state waters.
  - A blue and white International Code Flag A (or Alfa flag), at least 3.3 feet (one meter) high and visible from all directions, must be displayed on vessels on federally controlled waters. This flag indicates that the vessel is involved in a diving activity. On state waters, this flag may be displayed in addition to the divers flag but does not replace the divers flag.

Skier-Down Flag:
- Colorado law requires that vessels towing person(s) on water skis or similar devices carry and use an orange or red skier-down flag, at least 12 x 12 inches in size, whenever the towed person(s) or associated equipment is down in the water.

Marine Events:
- Permits for regattas, motorboat or other boat races, marine parades, tournaments, or exhibitions to be held on state-controlled waters must apply for authorization from Colorado Parks and Wildlife in advance of the event. If the event is being held on federally controlled waters, a permit from the U.S. Coast Guard is required.

Local Regulations:
- Local waterways may have specific equipment and operational restrictions in addition to those covered in this chapter. Be sure to check for local regulations before you go boating.
Requirements Specific to Personal Watercraft (PWCs)

In addition to adhering to all boating laws, personal watercraft (PWC) operators have requirements specific to their vessel.

◆ Every person on board a PWC must wear a U.S. Coast Guard–approved Type I, II, or III personal flotation device that is in good and serviceable condition.
◆ If the PWC is equipped by the original manufacturer with an ignition safety switch, the lanyard must be attached to the person, clothing, or PFD of the operator.
◆ PWCs may be operated between one-half hour before sunrise and one-half hour after sunset only.
◆ There are age and boater education requirements for operators of personal watercraft (see page 26).
◆ PWCs must be operated in a responsible manner. For example, it is illegal to:
  • Become airborne or completely leave the water while crossing the wake of another vessel at an unsafe distance from the vessel creating the wake or when visibility is obstructed.
  • Weave your PWC through congested waterway traffic.
  • Operate such that your PWC or another vessel must swerve abruptly or cut speed abruptly in order to avoid a collision.
  • Chase or harass wildlife with your PWC.

Towing a Person With a Vessel Legally

Vessel operators towing a person(s) on water skis, aquaplanes, surfboards, inner-tubes, or any similar devices must obey these laws also.

◆ Every vessel towing a person(s) on water skis or other devices must have on board, in addition to the operator, an observer watching the progress of the person being towed and capable of relaying messages to the operator.
◆ Each person being towed behind a vessel on water skis, an aquaplane, or a similar device must wear a properly fitting flotation device. USCG–approved Type I, II, or III PFDs are recommended; but a ski belt, water sports jacket, or foam wetsuit jacket will be accepted.
◆ The observer or operator of a vessel towing a person(s) on water skis or other devices must display a skier-down flag (see page 34) whenever the towed person(s) or associated equipment is down in the water. The flag must be displayed so that it is clearly visible.
◆ It is illegal for vessels to tow a person(s) on water skis or any other devices between sunset and sunrise.
◆ All motorized vessels in designated water-skiing areas must travel in a counterclockwise direction except when picking up a downed skier. When picking up a skier, the towing vessel should circle the skier to keep him or her in view of the operator at all times.
◆ It is illegal for vessels to tow a person(s) on water skis or any other devices within 150 feet of any harbor, swimming beach, mooring area, or any areas that are marked as being closed to water-skiing. Areas designated as a ski take-off or landing area are exempt from this restriction.
◆ Everyone engaged in water-skiing—the operator, the observer, and the towed person(s)—must conduct themselves in a safe manner. It is illegal to cause the towed device or person to collide with any object or person. It is also illegal to water-ski or manipulate any other towed device while under the influence of alcohol, a controlled substance, any other drug, or any combination of these substances.

Stay up-to-date on new boating laws!

Be sure to stay abreast of new boating laws and requirements.

For state boating law information, call Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Boating Safety Program at:
• 303-791-1954
• www.cpw.state.co.us/boating

For federal boating laws, visit the U.S. Coast Guard’s boating safety website at:
• www.uscgboating.org

Information in this manual does not replace what is specifically legal for boating in Colorado, which is found in Colorado Statutes and Regulations and federal laws.

If towing a skier with a PWC, the PWC should be rated for at least three people—the operator, the observer, and the retrieved skier.

Remember ...

As an owner of a PWC, you are responsible legally if you allow your PWC to be operated by others in violation of Colorado law.
Waste, Oil, and Trash Disposal in Colorado and Federal Waters

- It is illegal to discharge waste, oil, or trash into any state or federally controlled waters. This is for very good reasons.
  - Sewage carries disease and other pollutants that are harmful to people, aquatic plants, and animals.
  - Trash thrown into the water can injure swimmers and wildlife alike. It also can plug engine cooling water intakes.
  - Pollution is unsightly and takes away from your enjoyment of the water.
- Vessel operators need to be aware of the following regulations for waste, oil, and trash disposal that apply to both federally controlled and state waters. The Refuse Act prohibits throwing, discharging, or depositing any refuse matter of any kind (including trash, garbage, oil, and other liquid pollutants) into the waters of the United States.

Discharge of Sewage and Waste

Colorado law states that it is unlawful to deposit or discharge human waste or other refuse into the water. If you have a recreational vessel with installed toilet facilities, it must have an operable marine sanitation device (MSD) on board that is self-contained and incapable of discharging directly into the water.

- There are three types of MSDs.
  - Types I and II MSDs are usually found on large vessels. Waste is treated with special chemicals to kill bacteria before the waste is discharged. Types I and II MSDs with “Y” valves that would direct the waste overboard must be secured so that the valve cannot be opened. This can be done by placing a lock or non-reusable seal on the “Y” valve or by taking the handle off the “Y” valve.
  - Type III MSDs provide no treatment and are either holding tanks or portable toilets. Collected waste should be taken ashore and disposed of in a pump-out station or onshore toilet.
- Vessels 65 feet or less in length may use a Type I, II, or III MSD. Vessels over 65 feet in length must install a Type II or III MSD.
- All installed devices must be U.S. Coast Guard–certified.

Discharge of Trash

The Act to Prevent Pollution from Ships places limitations on the discharge of garbage from vessels. It is illegal to dump refuse, garbage, or plastics into any state or federally controlled waters. Many forms of litter can kill birds, fish, and marine mammals.

- You must store trash in a container while on board and place it in a proper receptacle after returning to shore.
- If boating on federally controlled waters and your vessel is 26 feet or longer, you must display a Garbage Disposal Placard in a prominent location. The Garbage Disposal Placard is a durable sign that is at least 4 x 9 inches and notifies passengers and crew about discharge restrictions.
Discharge of Oil and Other Hazardous Substances

Regulations issued under the Federal Water Pollution Control Act require all vessels with propulsion machinery to be able to retain oil mixtures on board.

◆ You are not allowed to discharge oil or hazardous substances. The penalty for illegal discharge may be a fine of up to $10,000.

◆ You are not allowed to dump oil into the bilge of the vessel without means for proper disposal. Fuel spills can be removed using absorbent bilge pads.

◆ You must dispose of oil waste at an approved reception facility. On recreational vessels, a bucket or bailer is adequate for temporary storage prior to disposing of the oil waste at an approved facility.

◆ You must notify the National Response Center immediately if your vessel discharges oil or hazardous substances in the water. Call toll-free 1-800-424-8802. Report the discharge's location, color, source, substances, size, and time observed. You also must call the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment at 1-877-518-5608 and report the discharge.

◆ If boating on federally controlled waters and your vessel is 26 feet or longer, you must display a 5 x 8-inch placard made of durable material, fixed in a conspicuous place in the machinery spaces or at the bilge pump control station, stating the following:

Waste Management Plan

◆ Ocean-going vessels that are 40 feet or more in length with cooking and sleeping facilities must have a written Waste Management Plan.

◆ The captain of the vessel is responsible for implementing the Waste Management Plan.

◆ The Waste Management Plan, identifying the vessel's name and home port, should be posted and should include directives to all persons on board about:
  • Discharging sewage and hazardous substances
  • Discharging garbage and other food waste
  • Disposing of plastics, bottles, and cans
  • Reading applicable placards for additional information
  • Advising the captain in case of oily discharges or diesel spills

Stop the Spread of Nuisance Species!

Introducing non-native species into Colorado waters can upset the balance of the ecosystem, thereby harming the environment. Aquatic nuisance species, such as zebra mussels, quagga mussels, milfoil, and hydrls, most often spread between waterways by hitching a ride on vessels and trailers. When transplanted into new waters, these organisms proliferate, displacing native species and damaging the water resource.

To prevent spreading aquatic nuisance species:

◆ Inspect your vessel and trailer, and remove any plants and animals you see before leaving the area.

◆ Drain your motor, live well, and bilge on land before leaving the area.

◆ Empty your bait bucket on land. Never release live bait into a body of water or release aquatic animals from one body of water into another.

◆ Rinse your vessel, propeller, trailer, and equipment.

◆ Air-dry your vessel and equipment for as long as possible.
Boating Accident Report Form

Boating Accidents and Casualties ... What the Law Requires You To Do

- An operator involved in a boating accident must:
  - Stop his or her vessel *immediately* at the scene of the accident *and* ...
  - Assist anyone injured or in danger from the accident, unless doing so would seriously endanger his or her own vessel or passengers *and* ...
  - Give, in writing, his or her name, address, and vessel identification to anyone injured and to the owner of any property damaged by the accident.

- A vessel operator involved in a boating accident must report the accident to Colorado Parks and Wildlife within five days after the date of the accident if the accident caused:
  - Loss of life or disappearance from a vessel *or* ...
  - An injury which required medical treatment beyond first aid *or* ...
  - Damage to the vessel(s) or other property exceeding $500.

- Accidents should be reported on accident report forms available from Colorado Parks and Wildlife. All reports must be submitted to:
  Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation
  Colorado Parks and Wildlife
  13787 South Highway 85
  Littleton, Colorado 80125

- Failure to report a boating accident is a misdemeanor.

Enforcement

Colorado Parks and Wildlife officers and all other peace officers enforce the boating laws of Colorado. U.S. Coast Guard officers also patrol and have enforcement authority on federally controlled waters.

- Officers have the authority to stop and board your vessel in order to check for compliance with state and federal laws.

- It is illegal to refuse to follow the directive of a person with law enforcement authority. An operator who has received a visual or audible signal from a law enforcement officer must bring his or her vessel to a stop.