Your Vessel’s Certificate of Registration and Decal

◆ Requirements for vessel registration vary from state to state. In Florida, you must have a Florida Certificate of Registration and validation decal to operate a vessel legally on public waters in Florida. The only exceptions are: non-motorized vessels less than 16 feet in length; non-motorized canoes, kayaks, racing shells, or rowing skulls of any length; and vessels used exclusively in private lakes and ponds.

◆ The Certificate of Registration and validation decal are issued by the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles.

• The registration and decal are obtained by submitting the proper application and fee to your county tax collector’s office. Additional information is available and application forms may be downloaded on the Internet at: www.hsmv.state.fl.us/html/forms.html.

• Fees for registration are based on a vessel’s length.

◆ The Certificate of Registration must be on board and available for inspection by an enforcement officer whenever the vessel is operated.

◆ The vessel’s registration number and validation decal must be displayed as follows.

• Number must be painted, applied as a decal, or otherwise affixed to both sides of the bow and placed where it can be observed clearly.

• Number must read from left to right on both sides of the bow.

• Number must be in at least three-inch-high bold BLOCK letters.

• Number’s color must contrast with its background.

• Letters must be separated from the numbers by a space or hyphen equal to the letter width: FL 3717 ZW or FL–3717–ZW.

• Decal must be affixed to the port (left) side of the vessel within six inches of the registration number. The decal may precede or follow the 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 Titling and Registering Your Vessel

◆ A Certificate of Title proves ownership. All vessels are required to have a Certificate of Title. The only exceptions are:

• A non-motorized vessel less than 16 feet in length

• A vessel used exclusively on private lakes and ponds

• Vessels documented with the U.S. Coast Guard

◆ A Certificate of Registration is valid for one or two years. For more information, go to www.flhsmv.gov/dmv/faqboat.html.

◆ The owner of a registered vessel must notify the county tax collector within 30 days if he or she changes address.

◆ The owner of a registered vessel must notify the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles within 30 days if the vessel is sold, stolen, destroyed, abandoned, or lost.

◆ Vessels must be registered and numbered within 30 days of purchase.

◆ If your vessel has a current and valid registration or certificate of number from another U.S. state or territory, you may operate it in Florida for 90 days before you are required to register it in Florida.

◆ 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. Documented vessels operating on Florida waters must have a current vessel registration from either Florida or another state.
Hull Identification Number (HIN)
- 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.
- It is illegal to destroy, remove, alter, or deface a Hull Identification Number.

Who May Operate a Vessel
- To operate a vessel powered by a motor of 10 horsepower or greater (including PWCs), a person who was born on or after January 1, 1988, must have completed a boater education course approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) or passed an approved equivalency exam.
  - Operators who are required to have completed a boating education course or exam must carry on board:
    - His or her Boating Safety Education ID Card issued by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and …
    - A photographic identification card.
  - These operators are exempt from the boater education requirement:
    - Persons licensed by the U.S. Coast Guard as a master of a vessel
    - Persons operating on a private lake or pond
    - Operators who are accompanied on board by a person who is exempt from the education requirement or by a person who is at least 18 years old, possesses the required identification cards, and is attendant to the operation of the vessel and responsible for any violation that occurs
    - Persons operating a vessel within 90 days after purchase who have a bill of sale on board and available for inspection
- No one under 14 years of age may operate any PWC on Florida waters at any time, even if such person possesses a Boating Safety Education ID Card.
- No one under the age of 18 years may rent/lease a PWC.
- It is also illegal for the owner of a PWC to knowingly allow a person under 14 years of age to operate a PWC.

Changes to the Boating Safety Education ID Card Requirements as of October 1, 2011
Effective October 1, 2011, operators born on or after January 1, 1988, who are required to have completed a boating education course or equivalency exam (see above) must carry on board:
- His or her Florida Boating Safety Education ID Card and a photographic identification card or …
- His or her course completion certificate showing successful completion of an FWC–approved boating safety course and a photographic identification card. The certificate:
  - Must give the operator’s first and last names, their date of birth, and the date they passed the course or equivalency exam and …
  - Is valid for up to 90 days from the day the certificate was issued and …
  - Is not a permanent replacement for the Florida Boating Safety Education ID Card.

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 the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC):
- 850-488-5600
or visit the FWC website at:
- www.MyFWC.com
For federal boating laws, visit the U.S. Coast Guard's boating safety website:
- www.uscgboating.org
Information in this manual does not replace what is specifically legal for boating in Florida, which is found in the Florida Statutes and federal law.

As an owner of a vessel, you may be responsible if you allow others to operate your vessel in violation of Florida law.
Unlawful Operation of a Vessel
Florida law states that it is unlawful to operate a vessel in a reckless or dangerous manner. Specifically, the law designates the following dangerous operating practices as illegal.

- **Reckless or Careless Operation** of a vessel or manipulation of water skis, aquaplanes, or similar devices is the failure to exercise the care necessary to prevent the endangerment of life, limb, or property of any person. Some examples are:
  - Boating in restricted areas without regard for other boaters or persons, posted speeds and wake restrictions, divers-down flags, etc.
  - Failing to follow the navigation rules

- **Improper Speed** is operating at speeds greater than posted speeds and that are not reasonable and prudent based on boating traffic, weather conditions, visibility, or other potential hazards. If no limits are posted, you should operate a vessel so that it does not endanger others. Vessel speed always should be maintained so that the vessel can be stopped safely. Specifically, it is illegal to:
  - Operate at a rate of speed that endangers the life or property of any person.
  - Operate at greater than “idle speed, no wake” in a posted “no wake” zone.

- **Exceeding Maximum Loading or Horsepower** is the failure of a vessel operator to ensure that his or her vessel is loaded safely and not overpowered. Florida law prohibits a person from operating a monohull vessel less than 20 feet in length while exceeding the maximum weight, persons, or horsepower capacity as displayed on the capacity plate installed by the vessel manufacturer.

- **Riding on the Bow, Deck, or Gunwale** is allowing anyone to ride on the bow, gunwale, transom, seat backs, seats on raised decks, or any other place where there may be a chance of falling overboard.

Boating Regulatory Zones
On Florida waterways there are signs restricting boat speed. Florida regulates boat speeds in certain areas either for protection of manatees or for boating safety purposes. It is important that boat operators look for signs, understand what they mean, and abide by the speed regulations. Here are the most common signs.

- **“Idle Speed, No Wake” Zone**: A designated area where vessels must be operated at a speed no greater than that which is necessary to maintain steerage and headway. The vessel should not produce a wake at this speed.

- **“Slow Speed, Minimum Wake” Zone**: Areas where vessels must be fully off plane and completely settled in the water. Any wake created by a vessel in one of these zones must be minimal (very small). If your vessel is traveling with the bow even slightly elevated while in one of these zones, it is not proceeding at “Slow Speed” as required by law.

- **Maximum 25 MPH, 30 MPH, and 35 MPH Speed Zones**: Controlled areas within which a vessel must not exceed posted speed.

- **Vessel Exclusion Area**: An area marked with a vertical diamond shape with a cross in the center that indicates all vessels or certain classes of vessels are excluded from the area.
Alcohol and Drugs

Florida’s laws against boating while impaired by alcohol or other drugs are as strict as those for driving a vehicle while impaired. Florida law prohibits anyone from boating under the influence (BUI). That is, it is illegal to operate any vessel or to manipulate any water ski, sailboard, or similar device while intoxicated due to alcohol or any combination of alcohol, a controlled substance, or drugs. 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 risks of consuming alcohol in Chapter 5.

- Florida law states that a person is considered to be “under the influence” if he or she has a blood alcohol concentration of 0.08 or higher, or is under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs to a degree which impairs his or her normal abilities. A blood alcohol concentration of 0.05 to 0.08 also may indicate a person is “under the influence” if accompanied by other competent evidence.
- Florida law establishes the following penalties.
  - Those convicted of operating under the influence of alcohol or drugs will:
    - Be fined up to $500 and imprisoned for up to 6 months for a first conviction.
    - Be fined up to $1,000 and imprisoned for up to 9 months for a second conviction.
    - Be fined up to $2,500 and imprisoned for up to one year for a third conviction.
  - If involved in a boating accident causing property damage, injury, or death while boating under the influence, the operator has committed a felony.
  - By operating any vessel on Florida waters, you have consented to be tested for the presence of alcohol, drugs, or other intoxicating substances if requested by a peace officer. Refusal to submit to testing is punishable by a civil penalty of $500 and is also a crime if you have ever been fined for a previous refusal.
- Florida law has special provisions for operators under 21 years of age.
  - It is unlawful for a person under 21 years of age who has any measurable blood alcohol concentration (0.02 or higher) to operate a vessel.
  - If convicted, those under 21 years of age will be required to complete 50 hours of public service, attend and successfully complete an approved classroom boater education course (even if one has been completed previously), and successfully complete a four-hour online course specifically for violators. The convicted person will lose his or her operating privilege until all requirements are completed.
  - A person under 21 years of age who refuses to submit to a breath test after a warning will be subject to performing 50 hours of public service and may not operate a vessel until the public service is completed.

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 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.

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!

Because you can drink faster than your system can burn the alcohol off, there is an increasing level of alcohol in your blood. This level is referred to as Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC).

.02 Law

Florida takes a strong stand against underage drinking while operating a vessel. Commonly referred to as the “.02 Law,” those boaters under 21 years of age who are found with a measurable breath alcohol level of 0.02 or higher are subject to receiving a citation with minimum mandatory sentencing. If a person under 21 is above a 0.08 breath alcohol concentration, he or she also can be charged with BUI.

Tough Penalties!

Any person who is convicted of BUI can be fined up to $5,000 and be sentenced to one year in jail if he or she has a blood alcohol or breath alcohol concentration of 0.15 or higher or was jail if he or she had a blood alcohol or breath concentration of 0.08 or higher, or is under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs to a degree which impairs his or her normal abilities. A blood alcohol concentration of 0.05 to 0.08 also may indicate a person is “under the influence” if accompanied by other competent evidence.

A person under 21 years of age who refuses to submit to a breath test after a warning will be subject to performing 50 hours of public service and may not operate a vessel until the public service is completed.

$250 Reward!

There is a $250 reward for information leading to a BUI arrest. Call *FWC from a mobile phone, or 1-888-404-FWCC (3922).

To keep a vessel in place by setting anchor or tying the vessel to a fixed object or buoy

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Life Jackets (Personal Flotation Devices)

All vessels must be equipped with U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jackets called personal flotation devices (PFDs). The quantity and type depends 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 carry one Type I, II, III, or V USCG–approved PFD for each person on board.
- All PFDs must be in good and serviceable condition, and legibly marked showing the USCG approval number. The PFDs must be of the proper size for the intended wearer. Sizing for PFDs is based on body weight and chest size.
- In addition to the above requirements, vessels 16 feet in length or longer must have one Type IV USCG–approved PFD on board and immediately available.
- Children under 6 years of age must wear a USCG–approved Type I, II, or III PFD at all times while on any vessel less than 26 feet in length that is underway upon Florida waters.
- Each person on board a PWC, and anyone being towed behind a vessel, must wear a USCG–approved Type I, II, or III PFD at all times.

### 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 recommended 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.

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**BOATER’S TIP**

An emergency situation (rough water, rapid onset of bad weather, or dangerous boating traffic) can occur suddenly—leaving little or no time to put on life jackets. Life jackets are very difficult to put on once you are in the water. Be a smart boater, and have everyone on board your vessel wear their life jackets at all times.

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**Types of Personal Flotation Devices**

Read and follow the label restrictions on all PFDs.

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**WEAR IT FLORIDA**

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State Law

Inflatable Life Jackets

Even though they have been available for years, many people are still unfamiliar with inflatable life jackets. For persons who want an alternative to traditional hot, bulky, and uncomfortable life jackets, these PFDs offer a U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jacket in a small, lightweight package.

◆ Inflatable life jackets come in several styles and colors.
  • Styles include a PFD that looks like a pair of suspenders and belt packs that look like a small fanny pack.
  • Some of these PFDs are designed to inflate if the wearer falls into the water.
◆ The most important advantage of inflatable life jackets is that they are comfortable enough for boaters to wear all the time on the water.
◆ Inflatable life jackets generally are not approved for use by people under the age of 16.
◆ Inflatable PFDs are not to be worn on PWCs or while water-skiing.
◆ Many inflatable PFDs are required to be worn instead of just carried in a bag or stowed in a storage area.
◆ They require some periodic maintenance and cost a little more than traditional life jackets; however, if it will save your life, it’s worth every penny.
◆ You should read and understand the operating instructions and the approval label before you choose an inflatable life jacket. Then be sure to wear it!

Fire Extinguisher Charge Indicators

Check the charge level of your fire extinguishers regularly. Replace them immediately if they are not fully charged.

Federal PFD Requirement for Children

◆ Vessels operating on waters outside the geographical boundaries of Florida (three miles or the edge of the Gulf Stream, whichever is greater, off the Atlantic coast or nine miles off the Gulf of Mexico coast) are subject to the new federal PFD regulation for children.
◆ On these waters, each child under 13 years of age who is underway on a recreational vessel must wear an appropriate USCG–approved PFD unless the child is below deck or in an enclosed cabin.

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, U.S. Coast Guard-approved fire extinguisher(s) on board if one or more of the following conditions exist:
  • Closed compartments under seats where portable fuel tanks may be stored
  • Closed storage compartments in which flammable or combustible materials may be stored
  • Closed living spaces
  • Permanently installed fuel tanks

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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. Only fire extinguishers that are USCG-approved are legal for use on vessels.

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</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.

Check all extinguishers annually to make sure they are fully charged. Fire extinguishers must be maintained in usable condition and should be serviced at least every two years. Refer to the label for additional servicing information. You also should 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 Control Devices**

All motorboats built after April 1940 with inboard-mounted gasoline engines (this includes inboards, inboard-outboards, and airboats) must have a backfire flame control device mounted securely to each carburetor.

- Backfire flame control devices must be:
  - In good and serviceable condition
  - U.S. Coast Guard–approved (must comply with SAE J-1928 or UL 1111 standards)
- Backfire flame control devices ensure that any engine backfire is dispersed into the atmosphere and also substantially reduce the chance of explosion or fire.
- Periodically clean the backfire flame control device and check for any damage.

**Ventilation Systems**

The importance of ventilation is crucial. The purpose of ventilation systems 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 cowls 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 after fueling, and before starting your engine.
- If your vessel is not equipped with a power ventilation system (such as PWCs), open the engine compartment and sniff for gasoline fumes before starting the engine.

**Mufflers**

- All vessel engines must be equipped with an effective muffling device. Vessel operators may not hear sound signals or voices if the engine is not muffled adequately, and the noise is irritating to other people.
- The use of any type of exhaust cutout that allows exhaust to bypass the engine muffling system is prohibited.
- Muffling an airboat's exhaust with automotive-style mufflers is required in Florida. (See page 60 for the requirements specific to airboats.)
State Law

Navigation Lights
- 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—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, to be displayed in time to avoid a collision.

All Vessels When Not Underway
All vessels are required to display a white light visible in all directions whenever they are moored or anchored away from dock between sunset and sunrise and/or during periods of restricted visibility.

An alternative to the sidelights and sternlight is a combination red, green, and white light, which must be exhibited near the top of the mast.

To prevent a collision, vessel operators should never leave shore without a flashlight. Even if you plan to return before dark, unforeseen developments might delay your return past nightfall.

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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.
- If pyrotechnic VDSs are used, a minimum of three must be carried in the vessel. Pyrotechnic VDSs must be dated and may not be carried past their expiration date in order to meet U.S. Coast Guard requirements.
- 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 on the water except when assistance is required to prevent immediate or potential danger to persons on board a vessel.

### U.S. Coast Guard–Approved Visual Distress Signals

**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

### Federally Controlled Waters

Waters on which vessels must observe federal requirements, including VDS requirements. These waters include:
- Coastal waters (Coastal waters are the Atlantic Ocean; the Gulf of Mexico; and all bays, sounds, harbors, rivers, inlets, etc., where any entrance is over two miles wide to the first point where the distance between shorelines narrows to two miles.)
- The Great Lakes
- Territorial seas

### 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.
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 that you disagree with the other boater’s intentions.

Sound-Producing Devices
In periods of reduced visibility or whenever a vessel operator needs to signal his or her intentions or position, a sound-producing device is essential. The navigation rules for meeting head-on, crossing, and overtaking situations described in Chapter 3 are examples when sound signals are required. All vessels are required to carry an effective sound-producing device, such as a whistle or horn, that is audible for at least one-half mile. Larger vessels also may be required to carry a bell or gong per federal Navigation Rule # 33, which can be found at [http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/?pageName=Rule3233](http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/?pageName=Rule3233).

Divers-Down Flag
State law requires that scuba divers or snorkelers display a flag whenever they are in the water.

◆ The divers-down flag is a square or rectangular red flag (if on vessels, at least 20 x 24 inches; at least 12 x 12 inches on towed buoys) with a white diagonal stripe and with wire or other stiffener to hold it unfurled and extended.

◆ In addition, a blue and white International Code Flag A (or Alfa flag) may be displayed on dive vessels on federally controlled waters. This flag indicates that a vessel is involved in a diving activity. The Alfa flag does not satisfy requirements of Florida state law.

◆ Boaters must make reasonable efforts to stay 300 feet away from dive flags in open water and 100 feet away in rivers, inlets, or navigation channels.

◆ Boaters approaching divers-down flags closer than 300 feet in open water and 100 feet in rivers, inlets, or navigation channels must proceed no faster than is necessary to maintain headway and steerageway (idle speed).

Other Equipment and Local Regulations

◆ **Trailers:** Florida law requires the following for boat trailers.
  • Trailers must have proper lighting including turn signals, tail lights, and brake lights.
  • Trailers must be equipped with safety chains and tie-down straps.
  • Trailers weighing more than 3,000 lbs. must be equipped with brakes that act on all wheels.
  • Trailers weighing less than 2,000 lbs. must be registered with the county tax collector. Trailers weighing 2,000 lbs. or more must be registered and titled.

◆ **Marine Permits:** All tournaments, regattas, races, parades, and exhibitions must have a permit from a county sheriff or the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Permits must be secured at least 15 days prior to the event. Permission for events on federally controlled waters must be obtained from the U.S. Coast Guard.

◆ **Local Regulations:** Many waterways in Florida have special regulations such as size and horsepower restrictions. Check with the governing body of the county or municipality where the waterway is located before you go boating.

Liveries (Boat/PWC Rental Facilities)
Facilities that rent vessels and persons who rent from these facilities must follow these regulations.

◆ The facility is prohibited from renting a vessel that does not have the proper safety equipment, exceeds the recommended horsepower or load capacity, or is not seaworthy.

◆ The facility must provide pre-rental or pre-ride instruction on the safe operation of the vessel with a motor of 10 horsepower or more.
All renters who are required by law to have a boater education ID card must present the card or its equivalent before the facility may rent to him or her.

PWC liveries must not rent to anyone under the age of 18 years.

PWC liveries must provide instruction to renters (see sidebar for details).

PWC liveries must inform renters of the following safety information on the proper operation of a PWC: propulsion, steering, and stopping characteristics of jet pump vessels; the location and content of warning labels; how to reboard a PWC; the applicability of the Navigation Rules to PWC operation; problems with seeing and being seen by other boaters; reckless operation; and noise, nuisance, and environmental concerns.

Requirements Specific to Personal Watercraft (PWCs)

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

- Everyone on board or being towed behind a PWC must wear a U.S. Coast Guard–approved Type I, II, III, or V personal flotation device (PFD) at all times. Inflatable PFDs are not to be worn on personal watercraft.
- An operator of a PWC equipped with a lanyard-type ignition safety switch must attach the lanyard to his or her person, clothing, or PFD.
- PWCs may not be operated during the hours between one half-hour after sunset to one half-hour before sunrise. Due to navigation light requirements, PWCs without navigation lights may operate only between sunrise and sunset.
- No one under the age of 14 years may operate any PWC.
- No one under the age of 18 years may rent or lease a PWC.
- A PWC must be operated in a reasonable and prudent manner. It is illegal to:
  - Weave your PWC through congested waterway traffic.
  - Swerve at the last possible moment in order to avoid collision (as in spraying another person or vessel, or playing “chicken”).
  - Jump the wake of another vessel unreasonably or unnecessarily close to that vessel or when visibility is obstructed.

Towing a Person with a Vessel Legally

Vessel operators towing a person(s) on water skis, an aquaplane, or any similar device must obey these laws also.

- All persons being towed behind a vessel on water skis or any other device must wear a U.S. Coast Guard–approved Type I, II, III, or V PFD. Inflatable PFDs and ski belts are not approved PFDs for water-skiing.
- Every vessel towing a person(s) on water skis, an aquaplane, or any similar device other than a parasail must have either:
  - A person on board, in addition to the operator, observing the towed person(s) at all times or …
  - A wide-angle rearview ski mirror designed to allow the operator to observe the towed person at all times. Note that factory-installed mirrors on PWCs may not meet this requirement.
- Every vessel that is towing a person on a parasail or similar device must have a person, in addition to the operator, observing the towed person(s) at all times. Rearview mirrors are not acceptable when towing persons on parasails.
- Persons may be towed behind a vessel on water skis, an aquaplane, a parasail, or any similar device during the hours of one half-hour before sunrise to one half-hour after sunset only.
- A reasonable distance must be maintained from a person in the water, another vessel, a bridge, a wharf, a pier, a dock, a buoy, a platform, a piling, or a channel marker. It is illegal to cause the person being towed to collide or be likely to collide with any object or person.

REMEMBER ...

As an owner of a PWC, you are responsible if you knowingly allow anyone under 14 years of age to operate your PWC in violation of Florida law.
Waste, Oil, and Trash Disposal in Florida and Federal Waters

- It is illegal to discharge untreated waste, oil, or trash into any federally controlled or state waters and 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 (including trash, garbage, oil, and other liquid pollutants) into the waters of the United States.

Florida's Clean Boater Program

Boaters sign a pledge promising to read the Clean Boating Habits booklet and to ensure that they and their passengers will abide by its guidelines. These boaters may display a Clean Boater sticker on their vessel.

The Clean Boater Pledge:

✔ Keep Florida's waters free of trash (bring your trash back)
✔ Practice proper fueling
✔ Recycle when possible
✔ Use pump-out facilities
✔ Help prevent the spread of exotics
✔ Be a clean boater example
✔ Encourage fellow boaters to “Take the Pledge”
✔ Remember that a clean environment always starts with me

Discharge of Sewage and Waste

If you have a recreational vessel with installed toilet facilities, it must have an operable marine sanitation device (MSD) on board.

- There are three types of MSDs.
  - Type III MSD, the simplest and most common, consists of holding tanks or portable toilets. It requires only a small storage space and is simple to operate. Type III MSDs have the least effect on the environment since the waste is to be discharged on shore into a local sewage treatment facility.
  - Type II MSDs* are required for vessels 65 feet and longer and use a combination of maceration, septic treatment, and chemical treatment to kill bacteria just prior to discharge.
  - Type I MSDs* are for vessels over 26 feet and under 65 feet long and use a combination of maceration and chemical treatment to kill bacteria just prior to discharge.
  - There may be a “Y” valve that directs untreated waste material for discharge or directs waste material for treatment prior to discharge. The “Y” valve must be secured to direct waste to the MSD at all times within Florida waters (three miles or the edge of the Gulf Stream, whichever is greater, off the Atlantic coast or nine miles off the Gulf of Mexico coast).
- All vessels 26 feet or more in length, which have an enclosed cabin with sleeping facilities, must be equipped with a toilet if on Florida state waters.
- On a vessel other than a houseboat, the toilet may be portable or a permanently installed toilet properly attached to an MSD.
- Every houseboat must be equipped with at least one permanently installed toilet properly attached to a Type III MSD.
- All installed devices must be U.S. Coast Guard–certified.
Discharge of Trash

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 State Warning Point and report the discharge.

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 Plan.
* The Waste Management Plan, identifying the vessel’s name and home port, should be posted and include directives to all passengers and/or crew about:
  * Discharging sewage and hazardous substances, garbage, and other food waste
  * Depositing plastics, bottles, and cans
  * Reading applicable placards for additional information
  * Advising the captain in case of oily discharges or diesel spills

Protect Florida’s Seagrasses

Seagrasses are plants totally adapted to living underwater. Their canopy of leaves that rise into the water and their net of roots that penetrate into the sediments below create a calm, stable, and protected habitat for a wide variety of marine life.

* Seagrass benefits the environment by providing habitat or nursery areas for young stages of fish, crustaceans, and shellfish, which are important to commercial and recreational industries. Seagrass also maintains water quality by stabilizing bottom sediments and removing nutrients from the water column, aiding the growth of other marine life.
* Seagrass loss in watersheds of estuarine and marine systems is caused by human activities such as dredge and fill activities, coastal development, nutrient pollution, degraded water quality, propeller scarring, and interruption of natural hydrology.
* If boating in shallow areas or seagrass beds, you could see a mud trail in your wake where your propeller has churned up the bottom, clouded the water, and likely cut seagrass roots. If you see this trail, you should: stop your vessel, tilt your motor out of the water and pole or walk your vessel out of the shallow area or seagrass bed.

Destruction of seagrass in Aquatic Preserves is a violation of Florida Law and carries a penalty of up to $1,000. Avoid damaging seagrass by knowing your boat’s operating depth and navigating in marked channels. Anchor only in bare sandy bottoms.

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State Law

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 ...
• Give assistance to anyone injured in the accident unless the action would endanger his or her own vessel, crew, or passengers and ...
• Give, in writing, his or her name, address, and identifying number of his or her vessel to the other vessel’s operator and/or owner of damaged property.
◆ Vessel operators involved in an accident must report the accident by the quickest means possible if the accident caused:
• A death or disappearance of a person or ...
• An injury causing a person to require medical attention beyond first aid or ...
• Damage to the vessel and other property of $2,000 or more.
◆ The report of the accident must be made to:
• The Division of Law Enforcement, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (call 1-888-404-3922, or *FWC from a mobile phone) or ...
• The sheriff of the county where the accident occurred or ...
• The police department of the municipality in which the accident occurred.
◆ Failure to report an accident and failure to render aid are both criminal offenses.

Enforcement and Penalties
◆ The boating laws and regulations of Florida are enforced by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and its officers, county sheriffs and their deputies, and any other authorized law enforcement officer.
◆ Boaters must stop when requested to do so by a law enforcement officer. These officers have the right to stop your vessel lawfully at any time to check for compliance with federal and state laws. They also have the right to order the removal of vessels deemed to be a hazard to public safety.
◆ Violators can expect enforcement action.
• Persons who violate boating laws and regulations may be subject to fines or, for more serious violations, subject to arrest.
• Upon conviction for serious offenses (like misdemeanors or felonies), violators may be sentenced to heavy fines and/or jail time.
◆ Florida law also requires mandatory education for violators.
• Persons who are convicted of a criminal boating violation, two non-criminal boating safety infractions within a 12-month period, or a non-criminal boating infraction that resulted in an accident are required to attend and successfully complete an approved boating safety course before operating a vessel in Florida again. This law requires attendance in a classroom course.
• In addition to the above, anyone convicted of a criminal boating violation or a non-criminal boating infraction that resulted in an accident also must take an approved four-hour online course for violators.
• Visit the FWC’s website at www.MyFWC.com to find courses that meet these requirements.

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.
◆ Slow to minimum speed within 500 yards and do not approach within 100 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 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.