Your Vessel’s Certificate of Boat Registration and Validation Decals

- Requirements for vessel registration vary from state to state. In Georgia, you must have a Georgia Certificate of Boat Registration and validation decals to operate your vessel legally on public waters in Georgia. The only exceptions are:
  - Sailboats under 12 feet in length
  - Canoes, kayaks, rowboats, and rubber rafts that have no mechanical propulsion (i.e., boats that are paddled, poled, rowed, or windblown)
  - Vessels operated exclusively on private ponds or lakes
  - Vessels registered in other states and using Georgia waters for 60 days or less

- You can apply for your Certificate of Boat Registration and validation decals by calling 1-800-366-2661 or by mailing an application and the fee to:
  Department of Natural Resources, Boat Registration Office
  P. O. Box 934943
  Atlanta, Georgia 30348-4943

- Applications are available from offices of the Law Enforcement Division of the Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR) or on the DNR website at www.goboatgeorgia.com.

- Renewals can be obtained over the Internet by visiting www.goboatgeorgia.com or by calling 1-800-366-2661.

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

- The registration number and validation decals must be displayed as follows.
  - Number must be painted, applied as a decal, or otherwise affixed to both sides of the bow.
  - Number must read from left to right on both sides of the bow.
  - Number must be in at least three-inch-high BLOCK letters.
  - Number’s color must contrast with its background.
  - Letters must be separated from the numbers by a space or hyphen: GA 3717 ZW or GA-3717-ZW.
  - No other numbers may be displayed on either side of the bow.
  - Current validation decals must be displayed on each side of the bow, preceding the prefix letters 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 Your Vessel

- A Certificate of Boat Registration is valid, for the current owner only, for three years and expires on the last day of the owner’s month of birth.
  - The expiration date is on the certificate and decals.
  - The owner may renew over the Internet at www.goboatgeorgia.com or by phone at 1-800-366-2661.

- If a vessel owner changes addresses or sells the vessel, he or she must give written notice to the DNR Boat Registration Office within 15 days of the event.

- If you abandon or destroy your vessel, you must report it to the DNR Boat Registration Office within 15 days and surrender your Certificate of Boat Registration.

- If you lose or destroy your Certificate of Boat Registration or decal, you must apply for a duplicate by renewing the registration, referenced on the next page. The fee is $1 plus the appropriate transaction fee. Check the “duplicate” box on the form.

- 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. If documented, the vessel is exempt from Georgia numbering requirements but must display the Georgia validation decals on the bow of the vessel.
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 Boat

■ Persons less than 12 years of age:
  • May not legally operate any vessel 16 feet in length or longer.
  • May legally operate a vessel less than 16 feet long and powered by a motor of 30 horsepower or less only if they are accompanied by a competent adult.
  • May legally operate any non-motorized Class A vessel.

■ Persons 12 through 15 years of age:
  • May not legally operate any vessel 16 feet in length or longer.
  • May operate a personal watercraft or a vessel less than 16 feet long if he or she:
    - Has passed a boating education course approved by Department of Natural Resources (DNR) or …
    - Is accompanied by a competent adult.

■ Persons 16 years of age or older may operate any boat on the Georgia state waters if he or she has proper identification on board.

Mandatory Education Requirement

■ Beginning on July 1, 2014, any person born after January 1, 1998, must have completed a boating education course approved by the DNR before he or she may legally operate a motorized vessel on Georgia state waters.

■ A person is exempt from the mandatory education requirement if he or she:
  • Is licensed by the U.S. Coast Guard as a master of a vessel or …
  • Operates on a private lake or pond or …
  • Is a non-resident who has proof that he or she has completed a NASBLA–approved boating education course or equivalency examination in another state.

Who May Operate a PWC

■ Persons less than 12 years of age may not legally operate a PWC.

■ Persons 12 to 15 years of age may legally operate a PWC only if they:
  • Have passed a boating education course approved by the Department of Natural Resources or …
  • Are accompanied by a competent adult.

■ Persons 16 years of age or older may operate a PWC on the waters of Georgia if he or she has proper identification on board.

■ Beginning on July 1, 2014, any person born after January 1, 1998, and operating a PWC on Georgia waters must meet:
  • The above requirements and …
  • The mandatory education requirement as explained above.

Registration Questions?

Contact the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Boat Registration Office at:

• 1-800-366-2661
• www.goboatgeorgia.com

Also, you can call or visit one of the DNR offices listed on the back of this manual.

competent adult
A person of age 18 or older who is not under the influence of alcohol or drugs and who is carrying proper identification

proper identification
A driver's license (or legible copy) or any other government-issued identification that contains a description of the person, a photograph, and date of birth
Unlawful and Dangerous Operation

Georgia law designates these dangerous operating practices as illegal.

- **Reckless Operation** of a boat or PWC is the disregard for the safety of persons or property. Examples are:
  - Water-skiing or dropping water-skiers close to swimmers, launching ramps, or other boaters
  - Jumping the wake of another boat within 100 feet of that boat or buzzing other boats
  - Causing damage from the wake of your boat or PWC

- **Improper Distance** is not maintaining a proper distance while operating a boat or PWC or while towing a person on water skis or any similar device. The following operations are illegal:
  - Operating a boat or PWC or towing a person on water skis or any similar device at greater than "idle speed" within 100 feet of a:
    - Moored or anchored boat or any boat that is adrift
    - Dock, pier, or bridge
    - Person(s) in the water
    - Shoreline adjacent to a full- or part-time residence
    - Public park or beach or a swimming area
    - Marina, restaurant, or other public use area
  - Running around or within 100 feet of another boat at greater than idle speed unless you are overtaking or meeting the other boat in compliance with the rules for encountering other boats
  - Following closely behind another boat, jumping the wake of the other boat, or changing course or direction in order to jump the wake of another boat

- **Failure to Regulate Speed** is operating a boat or PWC at speeds that may cause danger, injury, damage, or unnecessary inconvenience either directly or by the effect of the boat’s wake. It is illegal to:
  - Fail to regulate your speed near swimming areas, docks, moored boats, and boats engaged in fishing.
  - Operate a boat or PWC faster than is reasonable and prudent under the conditions (weather or boat traffic).

- **Overloading** is loading the boat beyond the recommended capacity shown on the capacity plate installed by the boat manufacturer.

- **Riding on the Bow or Gunwale** is illegal if the boat is not equipped with a railing or some other retaining device. As a boat operator, you are prohibited from allowing your passengers to ride on the bow or gunwale.
Alcohol and Drugs ... Zero Tolerance!

The Georgia Boat Safety Act prohibits anyone from boating under the influence (BUI)—that is, operating any boat, sailboat, personal watercraft, water skis, sailboard, or similar device while intoxicated. Alcohol and drugs cause impaired balance, blurred vision, poor coordination, impaired judgment, and slower reaction times. Alcohol is a major contributor to boating accidents and fatalities. Read more about the effects and risks of consuming alcohol in Chapter 5.

- Georgia boating law states the following.
  - It is illegal for those under the age of 21 years to operate a boat or PWC if their blood alcohol level is 0.02% or more.
  - Those 21 years of age or older are considered to be under the influence, and may not operate a boat or PWC, if their blood alcohol level is 0.08% or more or if drugs are detected.
  - It also is unlawful for the owner of a boat or PWC to allow anyone else to operate their boat or PWC while that person is under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
  - The Georgia Boat Safety Act sets these penalties.
    - Those arrested for boating under the influence may lose their privilege to operate a boat or PWC until they successfully complete a DUI Alcohol or Drug Use Risk Reduction Program approved by the Georgia Department of Driver Services. They also will be charged with a misdemeanor punishable by fines of up to $1,000 and/or prison time for up to one year.
    - A person found operating a boat or PWC under the influence while a child under the age of 14 years is on board also is guilty of the separate charge of endangering a child.
  - By operating a boat or PWC on Georgia waters, you have consented to be tested for alcohol or drugs if requested by a law enforcement official. If you refuse to be tested, you will lose your privilege to operate a boat or PWC for up to one year and your refusal may be offered into evidence against you at a trial.

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.

Avoid all security zones and restricted areas. Keep a sharp eye out for anything that looks peculiar or out of the ordinary.
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, III, or V personal flotation device for each person on board. However, Type V PFDs are acceptable only when worn and securely fastened.
- All PFDs must be in good and serviceable condition and must be readily accessible. The PFDs must be of the proper size for the intended wearer. Sizing for PFDs is based on body weight and chest size.
- **Georgia law requires that all children under 13 years of age wear a U.S. Coast Guard–approved PFD while on board any moving vessel.** This law does not apply when the child is in a fully enclosed cabin.
- In addition to the above requirements, one Type IV U.S. Coast Guard–approved PFD must be on board all boats (except vessels less than 16 feet long which includes PWCs, canoes, and kayaks) and readily accessible.
- One Type V PFD may be substituted for any other type if it is specifically approved by the U.S. Coast Guard for the activity at hand. Type V PFDs may not be substituted on children weighing less than 90 pounds.
- Each person riding on a PWC must wear a U.S. Coast Guard–approved Type I, II, III, or V personal flotation device that is properly fitted and fastened. Inflatable PFDs are not approved for use on PWCs.
- The person being towed must wear a ski belt; ski jacket; or Type I, II, or III personal flotation device that is properly fitted and fastened.

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.**
**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.
- Most vessels are required to have a Type B fire extinguisher(s) on board, in serviceable condition, and readily available. The only exceptions are:
  - Any non-motorized boat
  - Class A or Class 1 boats whose construction will not permit the entrapment of flammable gases or vapors
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

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**Fire Extinguisher Charge Indicators**

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

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**Remember …**

Keep bilges clean and free of trash in order to reduce the risk of fire.
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 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 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.  
- The exhaust of every internal combustion engine used on any vessel must be muffled or baffled and water injected (except those engines where the exhaust goes through the lower unit or outdrive when the vessel is planing) so as to decrease noise.  
- Enforcement officials are authorized to submit vessels to noise level tests and cite vessel operators whose vessels are not in compliance.  
- Many Georgia lakes also have specific laws prohibiting vessels from making excessive or disturbing levels of noise.
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 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 in all directions whenever they are moored or anchored outside a designated mooring area between sunset and sunrise.

3. Unpowered Vessels Less Than 23 Feet

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.
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, they must be dated. Expired VDSs may be carried on board, but a minimum of three unexpired VDSs must be carried in the vessel.

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.

U.S. Coast Guard–Approved Visual Distress Signals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pyrotechnic Visual Distress Signals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orange Smoke—Handheld</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange Smoke—Floating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day Signal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Meteor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day and Night Signal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Flare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day and Night Signal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Pyrotechnic Visual Distress Signals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electric Light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night Signal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange Flag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day Signal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 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 of when sound signals are required.

Use this chart to determine what is required based on your vessel’s length.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vessel Length</th>
<th>Sound-Producing Device</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 26 feet</td>
<td>None required, but highly recommended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 feet long or longer</td>
<td>Whistle, horn, or other sound signal is required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 65.6 feet (includes PWCs)</td>
<td>Whistle or horn audible for at least one-half mile is required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65.6 feet long or longer</td>
<td>Whistle or horn and a bell audible for at least one mile are required</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other Equipment

- **Diver-Down Flags**: Scuba divers or snorkelers must display a diver-down flag that marks the diving area. Vessels must remain at least 100 feet away from the person in the water. Two types of flags are used to indicate diving activity.
  - A rectangular red flag, at least 15 inches by 15 inches, with a white diagonal stripe is required on state waters.
  - A blue and white International Code Flag A (or Alfa flag) is required on federally controlled and international waters. This flag indicates that the vessel is involved in a diving activity.

- **Marine Events**: Permits for events held on state-controlled waters are required and are granted through the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. You must complete a Marine Event Permit application and submit it at least 30 days in advance of the event. If the event is likely to attract 10,000 or more persons, the request must be made 90 days in advance.

- **Hazardous Areas**: Certain areas have been designated and marked as “hazardous areas” because of conditions that create a threat to the safety and welfare of boaters. When operating within a “hazardous area,” all passengers in a vessel must wear a U.S. Coast Guard–approved personal flotation device that is properly fitted and fastened.

- **Georgia Boating Safety Zones**: Certain areas are designated as “boating safety zones” and have special restrictions.
  - It is unlawful to operate a powerboat between May 1 and September 30 within the areas of:
    - Jekyll Island, for a distance of 1,000 feet seaward from the high water mark on Jekyll Island Beach from the north end to the south end of the island
    - Tybee Island Beach, for a distance of 1,000 feet seaward from the high water mark on Tybee Island Beach from the north end to the south end of the island
    - St. Simons Island, for a distance of 1,000 feet seaward from the high water mark from the north end to the south end of the island
    - Sea Island, for a distance of 1,000 feet seaward from the high water mark from the north end to the south end of the island
  - It is unlawful to operate any type of boat during any time of the year within the:
    - Marked boundary of any marked swimming area
    - Upstream or downstream area of any dam designated by the Commissioner (these areas will be marked with signs and/or buoys)
  - It is unlawful to operate a boat with a motor in excess of 10 horsepower on the Ogeechee River from the bridge at Georgia Highway 119 upstream.
  - It is unlawful to operate any boat with a marine toilet, galley, or sleeping quarters (including houseboats) on Bull Sluice Lake, Lake Burton, Goat Rock Lake, Lake Harding, Lake Jackson, North Highlands Lake, Lake Oconee, Lake Oliver, Lake Rabun, Seed Lake, Tallulah Falls Lake, Tugalo Lake, and Yonah Lake.
Requirements Specific to Personal Watercraft (PWCs)

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

■ Each person riding on a PWC must wear a USCG–approved Type I, II, III, or V personal flotation device that is properly fitted and fastened.
■ PWCs must be equipped with a fully operational self-circling device or a lanyard-type ignition safety switch. If a safety switch is used, the lanyard must be attached to the operator’s person, clothing, or PFD.
■ PWCs may not be operated between sunset and sunrise.
■ A PWC, operating at more than idle speed, may not run around, ride or jump the wake of, or be within 100 feet of another moving boat or PWC unless it is overtaking the other boat in compliance with the rules for encountering other boats. When a PWC is overtaking another boat, it must not change course to ride or jump the wake of the boat being overtaken.
■ A PWC must be operated at idle speed if within 100 feet of a vessel not underway or adrift, a dock or pier, a bridge, a person in the water, a shoreline adjacent to a residence, a public park or beach, a swimming area, a marina, a restaurant, or any other public use area.
■ It is unlawful for an owner of a PWC to allow anyone else to operate their PWC in such a way that it violates the Georgia Boat Safety Act.
■ It is illegal to rent, lease, or let for hire a PWC to a person under the age of 16 years.

Towing a Person With a Vessel Legally

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

■ It is illegal for boats or PWCs to tow persons on water skis, a skiboard, or any device of this type between sunset and sunrise.
■ It is illegal for the operator of the towing vessel or person(s) being towed to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
■ A boat or PWC must not tow persons on water skis or similar devices within 100 feet of a vessel not underway or adrift, a dock or pier, a bridge, a person in the water, a shoreline adjacent to a residence, a public park or beach, a swimming area, a marina, a restaurant, or any other public use area.
■ The person being towed must wear a ski belt; ski jacket; or Type I, II, or III personal flotation device that is properly fitted and fastened.
■ Every boat towing a person(s) on water skis or a similar device must have on board:
  • A person, in addition to the boat operator, capable of observing the towed person(s) at all times or …
  • A wide-angle rearview mirror mounted such that the operator can observe the towed person(s) at all times.
■ Every PWC towing a person(s) on water skis or similar device must be rated by the manufacturer to carry three or more persons and must have on board a person, in addition to the PWC operator, capable of observing the towed person(s) at all times. A wide-angle mirror may not be used in place of an observer on PWCs.
Waste, Oil, and Trash Disposal in Georgia 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

- All vessels, including houseboats and floating cabins, that are equipped with a marine toilet must have a wastewater holding system to prevent the discharge of waste products into surrounding waters.
- A marine toilet is considered to be any equipment installed on board a vessel that is designed to receive, retain, treat, or discharge sewage and any process to treat such sewage. A portable toilet is not considered to be a marine toilet.
- It is illegal for a vessel to pump out sewage from a wastewater holding system, a portable toilet, or a marine sanitation device into surrounding waters except into an approved pump-out facility or into a sewer system located on dry land.
- All vessels equipped with a marine toilet must be registered with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. You will be issued a Marine Toilet Certificate decal that must be affixed to the hull adjacent to the vessel’s registration number.
- Vessels equipped with a marine toilet must follow these regulations.
  - If operated on Lakes Allatoona, Blackshear, Blue Ridge, Clarks Hill, Hartwell, Russell, Seminole, Sidney Lanier, Sinclair, Walter F. George Reservoir, or West Point, the vessel’s marine toilet must be equipped with a holding tank that is built so that it can be emptied only by being pumped out. The “Y” valve must be removed to prevent discharge.
  - If built before January 1, 1978, the vessel may be equipped with a fully operable USCG–certified Marine Sanitation Device (MSD) if the MSD is part of the vessel’s original equipment.
  - Sewage from the wastewater holding system or MSD must conform to the current guidelines for disposal.
- You must maintain a record, going back at least one year, of the name and location of the pump-out facilities you use to empty your holding system and the dates of such use.

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 U.S. Coast Guard 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 Georgia Environmental Protection Division within 24 hours 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

Oil Discharge Placard

A 5 x 8-inch sign that states the law pertaining to oil discharge

What to Do in Case of Discharge

If your vessel discharges oil or hazardous substances into the water, notify the U.S. Coast Guard by calling:
- 1-800-424-8802
You also must report the discharge to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division by calling:
- 1-800-241-4113

Stop the Spread of Nuisance Species!

Introducing non-native species into Georgia waters can upset the balance of the ecosystem, thereby harming the environment. Aquatic nuisance species, such as zebra mussels, quagga mussels, milfoil, and hydrilla, 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 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.
- You cannot be held liable for any civil damages for any assistance rendered in good faith and in a prudent manner.
- Vessel operators involved in an accident must report it by the quickest means possible if the accident results in:
  - Death or the disappearance of a person from a vessel under circumstances that indicate death or injury or …
  - Injury requiring first aid or medical attention or …
  - Property damage exceeding $2,000 to all vessels, docks, etc. involved in the accident.
- In the case of a reportable accident, the operator or owner must file an accident report form supplied by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.
- Most reports of accidents must be made within 5 days of the accident. However, you must report an accident within 48 hours if a person:
  - Dies within 24 hours as a result of the accident or …
  - Is disabled for more than 24 hours or …
  - Requires medical treatment for injuries or …
  - Disappears from a vessel.

Enforcement

- Primary responsibility for enforcement of the Georgia Boat Safety Act is with the Conservation Rangers of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. However, all peace officers are authorized to enforce the law.
- Conservation Rangers and other law enforcement officers have the right to:
  - Stop and board vessels to determine compliance with the Georgia Boat Safety Act.
  - Arrest any person(s) violating any provision of the Georgia Boat Safety Act or, in lieu of arrest, issue citations for violations.
  - Execute any warrants or search warrants for violations of the Georgia Boat Safety Act.
  - Enter any land, water, or vessel in the performance of their duty.