Illinois: The Legal Requirements of Boating

Your Vessel’s Registration (625 ILCS 45/3)

- Requirements for vessel registration vary from state to state. In Illinois, you must have an Illinois Certificate of Number (registration) and expiration decals to operate a vessel legally on public waters. Exceptions to the requirement to register recreational vessels include:
  - Sailboards
  - A canoe or kayak owned by a nonprofit organization
  - An unpowered vessel operated on a private lake
  - A vessel owned by the federal or state government
  - Vessels properly registered in another state and using Illinois waters for less than 60 consecutive days
  - Vessels documented with the U.S. Coast Guard and using Illinois waters for less than 60 consecutive days
- If your vessel requires registration, it is illegal to operate it unless it is registered and numbered.
- Watercraft registration application forms are available from Illinois Department of Natural Resources regional offices, conservation officers, and boat dealers. Boaters may renew their vessel registrations by phone (1-866-867-3542 or 1-800-867-3542) or online at the DNR website: [www.dnr.state.il.us](http://www.dnr.state.il.us)
- After registering a vessel, the owner will receive a Certificate of Number (registration card).
- Registration is valid for three years. All certificates expire on June 30 at the end of the three-year period.
- If an expiration decal is lost or destroyed, the vessel owner must apply to the Department of Natural Resources for a duplicate.
- The owner of a registered vessel must notify the Department of Natural Resources within 15 days if:
  - The owner changes his or her address or ...
  - The owner transfers all or any part of his or her interest in the vessel or ...
  - The vessel is destroyed or abandoned.
- Larger recreational vessels owned by U.S. citizens may (at the option of the owner) be documented by the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG). Call the USCG at 1-800-799-8362 for more information.

Displaying the Assigned Number and Expiration Decals (625 ILCS 45/3-3)

- The registration number and expiration decals must be displayed as follows.
  - Number must be placed on each side of the forward half of the vessel.
  - Number must read from left to right on one line, starting with two capital letters—IL—followed by a space and four numerals followed by a space and two capital letters. For example: IL 1234 AB.
  - Number must be in at least three-inch-high BLOCK letters.
  - Number’s color must contrast sharply with its background.
  - Decals must be placed on both sides of the bow after a space at the end of the number.
- Unpowered canoes or kayaks and federally documented vessels are not required to display the registration number but must display the expiration decals. Check with Illinois DNR for proper placement of decals on these vessels.
- No numerals and letters other than the registration numerals, letters, and expiration decals may be displayed on either side of the forward half of any vessel.

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Your Vessel’s Title (625 ILCS 45/3A)

- Every vessel that is required to have a Certificate of Number also must have a Certificate of Title. Federally documented vessels are exempt from this requirement.
- Any boater who owns a vessel without a title must apply to the Department of Natural Resources for a Certificate of Title before or at the same time application is made for a Certificate of Number.
- The Department of Natural Resources will not issue, transfer, or renew a Certificate of Number unless a Certificate of Title has been issued for that vessel.
- If your vessel requires titling, it is illegal to operate it unless you have a Certificate of Title for your vessel.

Hull Identification Number (625 ILCS 45/3-13)

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

Who May Operate a Vessel (625 ILCS 45/5-18)

- Persons under the age of 10 may not operate any motorized vessel, including personal watercraft.
- Persons at least 10 years old but less than 12 years old may operate a motorized vessel, including a personal watercraft, only if they are accompanied by and under the direct control of a parent, a guardian, or a person at least 18 years old designated by the parent or guardian.
- Persons at least 12 years old but less than 18 years old may operate a motorized vessel, including a personal watercraft, only if:
  - They complete a boating safety course and possess a boating safety education card accepted by the Department of Natural Resources or …
  - They are accompanied by and under the direct control of a parent, a guardian, or a person at least 18 years old designated by the parent or guardian.
- Persons 18 years old or older are not subject to operator age restrictions.
Unlawful Operation
Illinois law (Illinois Compiled Statutes, Chapter 625—625 ILCS) states that these dangerous operating practices are illegal.

- **Careless Operation** (625 ILCS 45/5-1) of a vessel is operating in a careless manner that causes danger to any person or property, or operating at speeds greater than that which allows the operator to bring the vessel to a stop within an assured clear distance ahead.

- **Reckless Operation** (625 ILCS 45/5-2) of a vessel or the reckless manipulation of water skis, a surfboard, or similar device is operating in a manner that causes danger to the life, limb, or property of any person. Examples of reckless operation are:
  - Weaving your vessel through congested waterway traffic
  - Jumping a wake of another vessel unreasonably close to the other vessel or when visibility around the other vessel is obstructed
  - Waiting until the last possible moment to swerve and avoid collision
  - Operating a vessel in a manner that creates hazardous wave or wake conditions while approaching or passing another boat

- **Overloading or Overpowering** (625 ILCS 45/5-4 and 45/5-6) is operating a vessel that has been loaded or powered beyond the recommended capacity and horsepower limits shown on the capacity plate installed by the vessel manufacturer.

- **Operating in Restricted or “No Wake” Areas** (625 ILCS 45/5-7 and 45/5-12) is not maintaining a proper speed and/or distance while operating a vessel. Specifically, it is illegal to:
  - Operate a vessel within an area that has been clearly marked by buoys or other markers as a bathing, fishing, swimming, or otherwise restricted area.
  - Operate a vessel within 150 feet of a public launching ramp at greater than a “slow, no wake speed.”
  - Exceed “slow, no wake speed” in any area marked with buoys or signs as “No Wake.”

- **Failure to Follow Navigation Rules** (625 ILCS 45/5-13) is not following the navigation rules described in Chapter 3.

- **Riding on Bow or Gunwales** (625 ILCS 45/5-21) is allowing a passenger to ride on the decked over the bow or stern, gunwale, or tops of seat backs of a motorized vessel unless the passenger is within guard rails to prevent falling overboard. This does not apply to persons assisting in anchoring, mooring, or casting off.

Other operational practices that are described as illegal are in the following sections on “Alcohol and Drugs”, “Obstructing Navigation”, “Requirements Specific to Personal Watercraft,” and “Towing a Person With a Vessel Legally.”

Alcohol and Drugs (625 ILCS 45/5-16)
Illinois law prohibits anyone from operating a vessel while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. 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.

- By operating a vessel on Illinois waters, you have given “implied” consent to alcohol and/or drug testing if arrested for operating under the influence. Refusal to submit to testing will result in loss of vessel operating privileges for a period of two years.
State Law

Illinois law states that a person is considered to be operating a vessel under the influence of alcohol or drugs if:

- The alcohol concentration in his or her blood or breath is 0.08% or more or …
- The person is under the influence of alcohol or …
- The person is under the influence of any other drug or combination of drugs and/or alcohol to a degree that renders him or her incapable of operating the vessel safely or …
- The person has any amount of a drug, substance, or compound in his or her blood or urine resulting from the unlawful use or consumption of cannabis, a controlled substance, or an intoxicating compound.

Illinois law establishes the following penalties for operating under the influence (OUI).

- Those convicted of OUI for the first time may be imprisoned for up to one year and/or fined up to $2,500.
- Repeat offenders will receive more severe penalties.

The penalty for OUI increases to a Class 4 felony if:

- The operator has a previous OUI conviction or …
- The offense results in serious personal injury or …
- The offense occurred when the operator’s privileges to operate a vessel were revoked or suspended.

The penalty for OUI increases to a Class 2 felony if the offense results in the death of a person.

Obstructing Navigation (625 ILCS 45/5-2)

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.
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 (625 ILCS 45/4-1)

- All vessels must have at least one USCG–approved Type I, II, or III PFD for each person on board or being towed. All vessels 16 feet or longer, except canoes and kayaks, also must carry one USCG–approved Type IV throwable device.
- All children under the age of 13 must wear a USCG–approved PFD on vessels less than 26 feet in length when underway unless they are below decks in an enclosed cabin. This does not apply to children fishing or boating on private bodies of water.
- A personal watercraft may not be operated unless each person on board is wearing a USCG–approved Type I, II, III, or V PFD.
- Sailboarders are exempt from PFD requirements but are encouraged to wear a PFD.
- Type V PFDs may be substituted for a Type I, II, or III if the Type V PFD is specifically approved for the activity for which it is being used.
- All PFDs must be in good and serviceable condition and 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.

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.

Types of Personal Flotation Devices

Read and follow the label restrictions on all PFDs.
PWC operators need to take special steps in case of fire. Because their fire extinguishers may not be easily accessible, they should simply swim away quickly and use another operator's extinguisher. They should not open the engine compartment to put out the fire.

Fire Extinguishers (625 ILCS 45/4-5)

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 equipped with an internal combustion engine operating on Illinois waters are required to have a Type B, U.S. Coast Guard–approved fire extinguisher on board.

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.

Fire extinguishers must be maintained in usable condition. Inspect extinguishers regularly to ensure the following.

- Seals and tamper indicators are not broken or missing.
- Pressure gauges or indicators read in the operable range.
- There is no physical damage, corrosion, leakage, or clogged nozzles.

Fire Extinguisher Charge Indicators

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

**Remember …**

Keep bilges clean and free of trash in order to reduce the risk of fire.
Backfire Flame Arrestors (625 ILCS 45/4-6)

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 (625 ILCS 45/4-7)

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.

Boat Battery (625 ILCS 45/4-10)

It is unlawful to operate a motorized vessel equipped with a stored battery unless the battery is secured against shifting. The battery must be equipped with nonconductive terminal shields to prevent accidental shorting. The best solution is a covered battery box with a strap.

Mufflers and Noise Level Limits (625 ILCS 45/4-3)

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

- The exhaust of every internal combustion engine on any vessel must be muffled effectively. That is, the engine’s exhaust must be muffled or suppressed at all times so as not to create excessive noise.
- It is unlawful to operate a vessel that exceeds a noise level of 90 decibels when subjected to a stationary sound level test or 75 decibels when in operation on state waters.

Ignition Safety Switch (625 ILCS 45/4-11)

It is unlawful to operate a motorized vessel, including a personal watercraft or specialty prop-craft, that is equipped with a lanyard-type ignition safety switch unless the lanyard is attached to the person, clothing, or PFD of the operator.
Navigation Lights (625 ILCS 45/4-2 and 45/4-8)

- 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.

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** (625 ILCS 45/4-12)

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**, including Lake Michigan, 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.

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

![Pyrotechnic Visual Distress Signals]

- **Orange Smoke**
  - *Day Signal*

- **Red Meteor**
  - *Day and Night Signal*

- **Red Flare**
  - *Day and Night Signal*

**Non-Pyrotechnic Visual Distress Signals**

- **Electric Light**
  - *Night Signal*

- **Orange Flag**
  - *Day Signal*

- If pyrotechnic VDSs are used, a minimum of three must be carried in the vessel. Also, pyrotechnic VDSs must be dated and may not be carried past their expiration date.
- The following combinations of signals are examples of VDSs that could be carried on board to satisfy U.S. Coast Guard requirements:
  - Three handheld red flares (day and night)
  - One handheld red flare and two red meteors (day and night)
  - One handheld orange smoke signal (day), two floating orange smoke signals (day), and one electric light (night only)

- It is prohibited to display visual distress signals while on the water unless assistance is required to prevent immediate or potential danger to persons on board a vessel.

**Pyrotechnic Devices**

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

**Non-Pyrotechnic Devices**

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

**Arm Signal**

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

**federally controlled waters**

Waters on which vessels must observe federal requirements, including VDS requirements; these waters include:

- Coastal waters
- The Great Lakes
- Territorial seas
- Bodies of water connected directly to one of the above, up to a point where the body of water is less than two miles wide
**Common Sound Signals**

Sound signals must be audible for at least one-half mile. 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.

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**Sound-Producing Devices** *(625 ILCS 45/4-4 and 45/4-8)*

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. For example, sound signals are required when meeting head-on, crossing, or overtaking (described in Chapter 3). Unnecessary sounding of whistles, horns, bells, or other sound-producing devices is prohibited.

- On Illinois state waters, all motorized vessels must have a mouth-, hand-, or power-operated whistle or other device capable of producing a blast that is two seconds or more in duration and audible for at least one-half mile.
  - These requirements apply to vessels operating on federally controlled waters.
  - Vessels less than 65.6 feet (20 meters) in length, which includes PWCs, are required to carry on board a whistle or horn or some other means to make an efficient sound signal audible for at least one-half mile.
  - Vessels that are 65.6 feet (20 meters) or more in length are required to carry on board a whistle or horn, and a bell that are audible for at least one mile.
- No vessel may be equipped with a siren, except law enforcement and emergency vessels.

**Other Equipment and Regulations**

- **Diver-Down Flag** *(625 ILCS 45/5-19)*: Persons scuba diving, skin diving, snorkeling, or underwater spearfishing must display a diver-down flag to warn other boaters. A diver must stay within 150 feet of the flag. Unless there is an emergency, a diver may not surface more than 50 feet from the flag. It is unlawful to display a diver-down flag when not diving. Vessels not engaged in diving operations must stay at least 150 feet from a displayed diver-down flag. Two types of flags are used to indicate diving activity.
  - A rectangular red flag with a white diagonal stripe that is one-fifth the width of the flag is required if on state waters. The flag must be at least 12 inches high and 15 inches wide, and mounted to be clearly visible.
  - A blue and white International Code Flag A (or Alfa flag), at least 3.3 feet (one meter) high and visible from all directions, must be displayed on vessels on federally controlled waters. This flag indicates that the vessel is involved in a diving activity.
- **Marine Events** *(625 ILCS 45/5-15)*: If a race, regatta, or other marine event is to be held on Illinois waters, you must apply for a permit from the Department of Natural Resources at least 30 days prior to the event.
- **Local Regulations** *(625 ILCS 45/8)*: Many local waterways in Illinois have specific equipment and operational restrictions in addition to those covered in this chapter. Be sure to check for local regulations before you go boating.
Requirements Specific to Personal Watercraft (PWCs) (625 ILCS 45/4-1, 625 ILCS 45/4-11, 625 ILCS 45/5-2, 625 ILCS 45/5-18, 625 ILCS 45/5-20)

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

- Every person on board a PWC must wear a U.S. Coast Guard–approved Type I, II, III, or V personal flotation device (PFD) that is in good and serviceable condition.
- If the PWC is equipped with a lanyard-type ignition safety switch, the lanyard must be attached to the person, clothing, or PFD of the operator.
- A PWC may not be operated between sunset and sunrise.
- There are minimum age and boater education requirements for operators of personal watercraft. See page 26.
- A PWC must be operated in a responsible manner. Maneuvers that endanger people or property are prohibited, including:
  - Weaving your PWC through congested waterway traffic
  - Jumping a wake of another vessel unreasonably close to the other vessel or when visibility around the other vessel is obstructed
  - Waiting until the last possible moment to swerve and avoid collision

Towing a Person With a Vessel Legally (625 ILCS 45/5-14)

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

- When a vessel is pulling a person on water skis, aquaplanes, or similar devices, the operator must have a competent person on board to act as an observer.
- All vessels, including PWCs, that are towing a person(s) on water skis, aquaplanes, or similar devices must be designed and recommended by the manufacturer to accommodate the operator, observer, and person(s) being towed.
- A person may not be towed from a half-hour after sunset to a half-hour before sunrise.
- Those towing skiers on water skis, aquaplanes, or similar devices and those being towed must act in a safe and prudent manner.
  - Vessels towing persons must maintain a reasonable distance from other persons and property so as not to endanger the life or property of any person.
  - It is illegal to operate the vessel or manipulate the towing rope, water ski, or other devices such that the towed device or person collides with any other person or object.
- If a person being towed is not wearing a U.S. Coast Guard–approved PFD, then there must be a PFD for that person onboard the vessel.
Waste, Oil, and Trash Disposal in Illinois 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 (625 ILCS 45/4-9)

- Illinois law states that it is unlawful to discharge any sewage into Illinois waters directly or indirectly.
- Federal law requires that every vessel with an installed toilet must have an operable U.S. Coast Guard–certified marine sanitation device (MSD) on board.
- There are three types of MSDs.
  - Types I and II MSDs are usually found on large vessels. Waste is treated with special chemicals to kill bacteria before the waste is discharged. Types I and II MSDs with “Y” valves that would direct the waste overboard must be secured so that the valve cannot be opened. This can be done by placing a lock or non-reusable seal on the “Y” valve or by taking the handle off the “Y” valve.
  - A Type III MSD, the simplest and most common, consists of a holding tank or portable toilet. 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 or at a sewage pump-out station.
- Vessels 65 feet or less in length may use a Type I, II, or III MSD. Vessels more than 65 feet in length must install a Type II or III MSD.
- All installed MSDs must be U.S. Coast Guard–certified.

Discharge of Trash

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

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

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

- You are not allowed to discharge oil or hazardous substances. The penalty for illegal discharge may be a fine 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.
- 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:

Discharge of Oil Prohibited

The Federal Water Pollution Control Act prohibits the discharge of oil or oily waste upon or into any navigable waters of the U.S. The prohibition includes any discharge which causes a film or discoloration of the surface of the water or causes a sludge or emulsion beneath the surface of the water. Violators are subject to substantial civil and/or criminal sanctions including fines and imprisonment.

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.

Stop the Spread of Nuisance Species!

Introducing non-native species into Illinois 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 Accident Report Form

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

(625 ILCS 45/6)

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

◆ A vessel operator is required to make a written report whenever a boating accident results in:
  - Loss of life or disappearance of a person or ...
  - Injury to any person or ...
  - Property damage in excess of $2,000.

◆ Accidents that result in death of or serious injury to any person must be reported to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) by the vessel operator within 48 hours of the accident. All other reportable accidents must be reported to the DNR within 5 days.

◆ Accident report forms are available from any DNR office or on the Internet at: www.dnr.state.il.us

◆ The vessel's owner is liable for any injury or damage caused by the negligent operation of any powered vessel.

Enforcement (625 ILCS 45/2 and 45/5-22)

Illinois Department of Natural Resources officers and all other law enforcement officers enforce the boating laws of Illinois. U.S. Coast Guard officers also patrol and have enforcement authority on federally controlled waters.

◆ Officers have the authority to stop and board your vessel in order to check that you are complying with state and federal laws.

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

◆ You must yield or slow to “slow, no wake speed” when being approached by or passing an emergency vessel using legal visual signals. Failure to yield or slow will result in a mandatory suspension of vessel operating privileges for a period of three months up to two years.