Your Vessel’s Registration and Decals

- Requirements for vessel registration vary from state to state. In Maryland, you must have a Certificate of Vessel Number (registration) and registration decals to operate a vessel legally on Maryland’s public waters. Exceptions to registration are:
  - Vessels without any kind of mechanical propulsion (that is, vessels propelled only by sail or manually)
  - Vessels properly registered in another state
  - Vessels documented with the U.S. Coast Guard

- The Certificate of Vessel Number and registration decals are obtained by submitting the proper application form and fee to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Licensing & Registration Service.

- The Certificate of Vessel Number (pocket-sized registration card) must be on board and available for inspection by an enforcement officer whenever the vessel is operated.

- The vessel number and registration decals must be displayed as follows.
  - Number must be painted, applied as a decal, or otherwise affixed to the forward half (bow) of each side of the vessel, placed well above the waterline.
  - 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 sharply with its background.
  - Letters must be separated from the numbers by a space or hyphen: MD 3717 ZW or MD-3717-ZW.
  - No other numbers may be displayed on either side of the bow.
  - Decals must be affixed on each side of the vessel within three inches of the vessel number and may be placed in front of, behind, above, or below 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 Registering and Titling Your Vessel

- All vessels that require registration must be titled in Maryland also. A vessel will not be registered or have its registration renewed without a valid title. Payment of vessel excise tax on a vessel must accompany an application for a title.

- A Certificate of Vessel Number is valid for two years and expires on December 31 of the calendar year following the year the certificate is issued.

- The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) must be notified within 15 days of the sale, trade, or transfer of ownership of a registered vessel.

- You must notify the MDNR within 15 days if your registered vessel is abandoned, lost, stolen, or destroyed.

- If you lose or destroy your Certificate of Vessel Number or decals, you must apply for a duplicate and submit a processing fee.

- A vessel’s trailer must be registered with the Motor Vehicle Administration.

- 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. Documented vessels must apply to the MDNR for “documented use” decals and pay vessel excise tax.
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 hull 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.
- If your vessel is custom or home-built, contact the Department of Natural Resources to have a hull identification number assigned to your vessel.
- It is illegal to destroy, remove, alter, cover, or deface a hull identification number.

Who May Operate a Vessel

Age and Boating Education Requirements

- All persons born on or after July 1, 1972, must have in their possession a Certificate of Boating Safety Education to operate a numbered or documented vessel (including personal watercraft) legally on Maryland’s public waters.
- The Certificate of Boating Safety Education is obtained by successfully completing a NASBLA–approved boating safety education course or passing an equivalency examination approved by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. The certificate is valid for the lifetime of the person to whom it is issued.
- Persons required to have a Certificate of Boating Safety Education must have the certificate on board and available for inspection by an enforcement officer whenever operating a vessel on Maryland waters.
- No one under 16 years of age may legally operate a personal watercraft, even if the person possesses a Certificate of Boating Safety Education.
- No one under 12 years of age may legally operate a vessel towing a person(s) on water skis, an aquaplane, a parasail, or a similar device.

Exemptions to the Boating Education Requirements

- Motorized boats 11 feet or MORE in length: Persons under 16 years of age who do not have a valid Certificate of Boating Safety Education may operate these vessels only if they are under the supervision of a person 18 years of age or older.
  - Supervising persons born on or after July 1, 1972, must possess a valid Certificate of Boating Safety Education.
  - Supervising persons born before July 1, 1972, are not required to have a Certificate of Boating Safety Education.
- Motorized boats LESS than 11 feet in length: Persons under 16 years of age who do not have a valid Certificate of Boating Safety Education may operate these vessels only if they are under the supervision of a person who:
  - Possesses a valid Certificate of Boating Safety Education or …
  - Was born before July 1, 1972.
- The following persons born after July 1, 1972, also are exempted from the above requirements:
  - Anyone licensed by the U.S. Coast Guard to operate a commercial vessel
  - Persons visiting Maryland for 90 days or less in a vessel from a foreign country
  - Residents of another state boating on Maryland waters for 60 days or less in a vessel properly registered in their home state who:
    - Are at least 16 years of age or …
    - Have proof that they have passed a boating safety education course approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators.
Unlawful Operation of a Vessel

Maryland law states that these dangerous operating practices are illegal.

- **Reckless or Negligent Operation** of a vessel is operating in a manner that causes danger to the life, limb, or property of any person. Examples of reckless or negligent operation are:
  - Operating in a swimming area
  - Operating under the influence of alcohol or drugs (read more on next page)
  - Operating at an excessive speed in the vicinity of other vessels or in dangerous waters
  - Riding on the bow, gunwales, transom, seat backs, or any other place where there is danger of falling overboard
  - Jumping the wake of another vessel too close to that vessel
  - Operating such that your vessel collides with another vessel, object, or person

- **Improper Speed** is not maintaining a proper speed while operating a vessel. Specifically, it is illegal to operate a vessel:
  - At an excessive speed in the vicinity of other vessels or in dangerous waters
  - At greater than “minimum wake speed” in any posted minimum wake zone
  - At greater than the posted speed limit on any body of water

- **Overloading or Overpowering** is loading or powering the vessel beyond the safe load and power limits, taking into consideration weather and other operating conditions. The safe load and power limits for vessels are shown on the capacity plate installed by the vessel manufacturer (see Chapter 1).

- **Especially Hazardous Condition** is operating a vessel in a condition that causes a hazard to the occupants or to others on the waterways. For any of the following problems, law enforcement officers may instruct the operator to take immediate corrective action or return to mooring.
  - The vessel is overloaded or overpowered.
  - There are insufficient personal flotation devices, fire extinguishers, backfire flame arrestors, ventilation systems, or navigation lights.
  - The vessel is leaking fuel or taking on water.

Remember ...

As an owner of a vessel, you are responsible for any injury or damage caused by the negligent operation of your vessel.

**Remember ...**

As an owner of a vessel, you are responsible for any injury or damage caused by the negligent operation of your vessel.

**gunwale**
Upper edge of vessel’s side (generally pronounced “gunnel”)

**overboard**
Over the side or out of the vessel

**“minimum wake speed”**
The speed at which the vessel does not produce a wake

The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and U.S. Power Squadrons will perform a Vessel Safety Check (VSC) of your vessel and equipment free of charge. This inspection covers federal and state requirements. If your vessel meets all VSC requirements, you will receive a VSC decal. If your vessel fails to meet all requirements, no report is made to any law enforcement agency.
Alcohol and Drugs

Maryland law prohibits anyone from boating under the influence (BUI). This includes operating any vessel while under the influence of or impaired by alcohol and/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.

- Maryland law states that a person is considered to be boating under the influence (BUI) if he or she:
  - Has a blood or breath alcohol concentration of 0.08% or greater or …
  - Is impaired by alcohol or …
  - Is so far impaired by any drug, combination of drugs, or combination of one or more drugs and alcohol that he or she cannot operate a vessel safely or …
  - Is impaired by any controlled dangerous substance.

- Maryland law establishes the following penalties for boating under the influence:
  - Upon a first conviction, a fine of up to $1,000, imprisonment for up to one year, or both
  - Upon a second conviction, a fine of up to $2,000, imprisonment for up to two years, or both
  - Upon a third conviction, a fine of up to $3,000, imprisonment for up to three years, or both

- By operating a vessel on Maryland waters, you have consented to be tested for alcohol or drugs if requested by a law enforcement officer.

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.
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 PFD (life jacket) for each person on board.

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

- **Children under 13 years of age** must wear a USCG–approved PFD while underway on a recreational vessel under 21 feet in length, unless the vessel is moored or anchored or the child is below deck or in an enclosed cabin.

- There are additional requirements for PFDs for children under 4 years of age.

- Each person being towed behind a vessel on water skis, a surfboard, or similar device must wear a USCG–approved PFD. High-impact rated PFDs are recommended.

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

- A person operating a sailboard or stand-up paddle board may meet the PFD requirement by using other approved special-use flotation devices.

- All PFDs must be in good and serviceable condition, readily accessible, and 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, waterskiing, or stand-up paddle boarding. 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.
Small Child PFD Law

The following requirements are also part of Maryland law.

- A child under the age of 4 must wear a PFD that has additional safety precautions as appropriate for an infant, toddler, or young child. These PFDs must:
  - Hold the child securely within the PFD, including a strap that is secured between the child’s legs to fasten together the front and back of the PFD and …
  - Maintain the buoyancy of the child, including an inflatable headrest or high collar, or ensure the ready accessibility of the child from the vessel, including a webbed handle.
- This law does not apply to a vessel that is moored or anchored or to a child who 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 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:
  - Inboard engine
  - Closed compartments under seats where portable fuel tanks may be stored
  - Double-bottoms that are not sealed to the hull or that are not completely filled with flotation material
  - Closed living spaces
  - Closed storage compartments in which flammable or combustible materials may be stored
  - Permanently installed fuel tanks
- Approved types of fire extinguishers are identified by the following marking on the label—“Marine Type USCG Approved”—followed by the type and size symbols and the approval number.

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

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

* refers to a permanently installed fire extinguisher system

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

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

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

**Ventilation Systems**

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

- All gasoline-powered vessels, constructed in a way that would entrap fumes, must have at least two ventilation ducts fitted with 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.

- All vessels manufactured after January 1, 1990, operating on Maryland waters must be equipped with a muffler system in good working order and in constant operation to suppress engine noise.
- You may not remove or modify a muffler or muffling system if the result is an increase in noise level.
- No person may operate a vessel that emits noise in excess of 90 db(A) on Maryland waters.
- On the waters of Deep Creek Lake and from the mouth of the Northeast and Elk Rivers to include all tributaries including the Bohemia River and the C&D Canal, additional restrictions apply.
  - A person may not operate a vessel in a way that exceeds the following vessel noise levels.
    - For engines manufactured before January 1, 1993, the noise level may not exceed 90 db(A).
    - For engines manufactured on or after January 1, 1993, the noise level may not exceed 88 db(A).
- A vessel must operate a continuous muffler or noise suppression system and may not operate a device that bypasses, reduces, or eliminates the effectiveness of a muffler or engine noise suppression device or system.
- Vessels involved in a marine event approved by the U.S. Coast Guard or the Maryland Department of Natural Resources are exempt from the requirements above.

---

**WARNING:**
Gasoline vapors can explode. Before starting engine, operate blower for four minutes and check (using your nose) engine compartment for gasoline vapors.

Vessels built after July 31, 1980, which contain power exhaust blowers in gasoline engine compartments, must have the above warning sticker placed near the instrument panel.

---

**backfire**
Explosion of prematurely ignited fuel or of unburned exhaust gases in an internal combustion engine

**cowl**
Hooded opening designed to scoop in air

---

Powerboats are built to ventilate the engine when underway. As the boat moves along, an air intake scoops up fresh air and forces it down the air duct into the engine compartment. The exhaust sucks out the explosive fumes from the lowest part of the engine and fuel compartments.
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. Vessels less than 23.0 feet (7 meters) long are exempt from this requirement unless anchored in or near a narrow channel, fairway, or anchorage, or where other vessels normally navigate.

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.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pyrotechnic Visual Distress Signals</th>
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</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>

If pyrotechnic VDSs are used, a minimum of three must be carried in the vessel. Also, pyrotechnic VDSs must be dated and may not be carried past their expiration date.

The following combinations of signals are examples of VDSs that could be carried on board to satisfy U.S. Coast Guard requirements:

- Three handheld red flares (day and night)
- One handheld red flare and two red meteors (day and night)
- One handheld orange smoke signal (day), two floating orange smoke signals (day), and one electric light (night only)

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

### Pyrotechnic Devices

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

### Non-Pyrotechnic Devices

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

### Arm Signal

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

### federally controlled waters

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

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

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

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

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

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

Negligence

Negligence includes, but is not limited to:
- Jumping or attempting to jump the wake of another vessel within 100 feet of that vessel.
- Riding backward and/or standing on the seat of the PWC while riding.
- Weaving through and recklessly operating in congested areas.
- Speeding in restricted areas such as marinas, minimum wake zones, and environmentally sensitive areas.
- Operating in a manner that endangers the life, limb, or property of any person, including the operator. Examples are splashing or spraying others, buzzing piers and other boats, and tossing off passengers.

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.

- All vessels on state and federally controlled waters must have a sound-producing device to communicate.
- The required sound-producing devices are as follows.
  - 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 vessels used by law enforcement officers.

Other Equipment and Regulations

- **Diver-Down Flags**: Persons scuba diving, skin diving, or snorkeling must display a diver-down flag to mark their diving area. If a diver-down flag is spotted while boating, be careful and do not approach out of curiosity. Maintain a distance of at least 100 feet between the flag and your vessel when boating on inland waters. In bays and open waters, stay at least 300 feet away. Two types of flags are used to indicate diving activity.
  - A rectangular red flag with a white diagonal stripe is attached to a vessel, float, or buoy.
  - A blue and white International Code Flag A (or Alfa flag), at least 3.3 feet (one meter) high and visible from all directions, is flown from a vessel on federally controlled or international waters that is restricted in its ability to maneuver. This flag indicates that the vessel is involved in a diving activity.
- **Trailers**: Maryland law requires that all trailers be equipped with two safety chains that are strong enough to control the trailer if the hitch or coupling breaks.
- **Marine Events**: Permits for regattas, motorboat races, or other boat races; marine parades; tournaments; or exhibitions to be held on state waters must be obtained from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources in advance of the event. If the event is being held on federally controlled waters, a permit from the U.S. Coast Guard is required.
- **Local Regulations**: Local waterways may have specific equipment and operational restrictions in addition to those covered in this chapter. Be sure to check for local regulations before going boating. See page 62 for regulations that apply on some specific Maryland waters.

Requirements Specific to Personal Watercraft (PWCs)

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

- Every person on board a PWC must wear a U.S. Coast Guard–approved Type I, II, III, or V personal flotation device (life jacket).
- PWCs must be equipped with a fully operational self-circling device or a lanyard-type ignition safety switch. If the ignition safety switch is used, the lanyard must be attached to the person, clothing, or PFD of the operator.
- PWCs may be operated only between sunrise and sunset.
- There are age and boater education restrictions on operators of personal watercraft. See page 26.
- PWCs must be operated in a reasonable and prudent manner. The following activities are not allowed.
  - A PWC may not be operated in a negligent manner. (See sidebar.)
  - On all Maryland state waters, a PWC may not be operated at greater than 6 knots (6.9 miles per hour) within 100 feet of any shore, wharf, pier, bridge structure, abutment, or persons in the water.
• On Maryland state waters of the Atlantic Ocean, a PWC may not be operated within 300 feet of persons in the water or surf fishermen.
• A PWC may not be operated at greater than 6 knots (6.9 miles per hour) within 100 feet of another vessel except in a crossing or overtaking situation in accordance with the navigation rules.
• A PWC may not be operated at greater than “minimum wake speed” on Maryland state waters less than 18 inches deep, except when required to maintain speed in a crossing or overtaking situation.
• A PWC may not be used to chase, harass, or disturb wildlife.
• All PWCs registered in Maryland must display, in clear view of the operator, a regulations sticker that explains the PWC regulations. (Stickers are available from the MDNR Police, Safety Education Section at 410-643-8502.)

**Towing a Person With a Vessel Legally**

Vessel operators towing a person(s) on water skis, aquaplanes, tubes, kneeboards, or similar devices must obey these laws also.
- No one under 12 years of age may operate legally a vessel towing a person(s) on water skis, an aquaplane, a parasail, or similar device.
- Every vessel towing a person(s) on water skis, an aquaplane, or other device must have on board, in addition to the operator, an observer at least 12 years of age in a position to observe the person being towed. On a PWC, the observer must be facing the rear of the PWC.
- All persons being towed behind a vessel on water skis, an aquaplane, or other device must wear a USCG—approved personal flotation device (life jacket).
- A vessel may tow a person(s) on water skis, a surfboard, or other device only between the hours of sunrise and sunset.
- It is illegal to operate any vessel or manipulate any water skis, an aquaplane, or a similar device in a careless, reckless, or negligent manner that endangers the life, limb, or property of any person.
- Except for taking off from shore, the towing vessel must stay at least 100 feet from shores, piers, bridges, people in the water, and other passing vessels.
- Ski ropes may not be more than 75 feet in length, except when barefoot skiing in which case a ski rope of 100 feet in length may be used.
- A PWC may not be used to tow a person on water skis, an aquaplane, or similar device unless the PWC has the capacity to carry at least three persons (the operator, a rear-facing observer, and the skier) and the PWC is designed specifically for water-skiing by the manufacturer.

**Wake Surfing Behind a Boat**

- To wake surf, a person rides on a device similar to a surfboard in the wake just behind a boat.
  - The wake surfer holds onto a tow (ski) rope only until he or she is up out of the water. Then the rope is tossed into the boat.
  - The boat travels at slow speeds of 9 to 14 mph.
  - To create the larger wake that a wake surfer needs, the boat carries artificial ballast.
- Persons involved in wake surfing must follow these regulations.
  - Due to the large wake, a boat involved in wake surfing must be operated at least 200 feet from:
    - The shoreline
    - All marine structures, including piers, docks, bridge structures, abutments, and anchored swimming or water-skiing floats
    - Navigation aids such as regulatory buoys and channel markers
    - Other vessels that are underway, anchored, or moored
    - Persons in the water
  - Any portable ballast tank must have a manufacturer’s label that gives the tank’s maximum capacity in gallons and/or maximum weight in pounds.
  - The combined weight of the ballast, passengers, gear, and motors must not exceed the maximum weight capacity for the vessel.

**Remember …**

As an owner of a PWC, you are responsible legally if you allow the PWC to be operated in violation of Maryland law.

**Stay up-to-date on new boating laws!**

Be sure to stay abreast of new boating laws and requirements.
- For state boating law information, contact the Maryland Department of Natural Resources at: 410-643-8502
- Visit our website at www.dnr.state.md.us/boating/regulations/
- For federal boating laws, visit the U.S. Coast Guard’s boating safety website at: www.uscgboating.org

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

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

**Requirements for Paddleboards**

When using a paddleboard beyond the narrow limits of a swimming, surfing, or bathing area, certain requirements apply.
- Paddleboard users must comply with recreational boating laws and rules.
- Paddleboards must have:
  - A life jacket for each person on board
  - A sound-producing device such as a whistle
  - Navigation lights when used between sunset and sunrise – this may be a flashlight or a headlamp with a white light
  - Visual distress signals when used on federally controlled waters

**artificial ballast**

- Portable tanks or weights, such as water, lead weights, cement, passengers, or other heavy objects, spread throughout a boat to make it produce a large wake at slow speeds
Waste, Oil, and Trash Disposal in Maryland 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

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.

• 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.
• Type III MSDs, the simplest and most common, consist of holding tanks or portable toilets. They require only a small storage space and are 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 such as a pump-out station.

■ While a vessel with an installed toilet is on Maryland or federally controlled waters, the operator must ensure that there is no possibility of discharging sewage overboard.

• Types I and II MSDs with “Y” valves must be secured by bypassing, locking, securing, or disabling the valve by using a padlock or non-reusable seal or by removing the valve handle so that waste cannot be directed overboard.
• Vessels with a Type III MSD must disconnect or physically block any on-board sewage lines or hull fittings that would allow waste to be discharged overboard.

■ 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 devices must be U.S. Coast Guard–certified.
■ For more information on pump-out stations, visit www.dnr.state.md.us on the Internet or call 410-260-8772.

Discharge of Trash

The Act to Prevent Pollution from Ships places limitations on the discharge of garbage from vessels. Maryland law also states that it is illegal to throw; dump; deposit; or cause to be thrown, dumped, or deposited any trash, junk, or other refuse into any Maryland waters. The vessel owner as well as the operator are liable for any trash thrown from a vessel.

■ You must store trash in a container 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.

- Regulations prohibit the discharge of petroleum in any form that causes a sheen on the surface of the water. 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.
  - Oil can be removed safely during maintenance with an oil extractor vacuum pump.
  - Oil absorbent pads and pillows can be used to keep bilges clean and oil free.
- 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 Maryland Department of the Environment at 1-866-633-4686 and report the discharge.
- The Federal Clean Water Act states that it is illegal to use liquid soap or other detergent to dissolve oil in the water.
- 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:

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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.
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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

Help Protect Maryland’s Coastal Bays

Maryland’s coastal bays consist of Assawoman, Isle of Wight, Sinepuxent, Newport, and Chincoteague Bays that are along Maryland’s Atlantic coast and behind Assateague Island and Ocean City. This region is experiencing the most rapid population increases in the entire state, and Worcester County alone is expected to almost double in size by 2020. As a boater, you can help protect these cherished bays by adopting the following practices.

- Never let plastic bags or other trash blow out of your boat. At least half the deaths from stranded sea turtles and dolphins are from ingestion of plastics.
- 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.

To prevent spreading aquatic nuisance species:

- Inspect your vessel and trailer, and remove any plants and animals you see before leaving the area.
- Rinse your vessel, propeller, trailer, and equipment.
- Air-dry your vessel and equipment for as long as possible.

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 National Response Center by calling:

- 1-800-424-8802

Also notify the Maryland Department of the Environment, Emergency Response Division, by calling:

- 1-866-633-4686

Stop the Spread of Nuisance Species!

Introducing non-native species into Maryland 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.

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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.
■ Keep your propeller out of seagrass beds, and do not accelerate rapidly in shallow areas. This kills seagrasses, which are vital to juvenile fish, clams, and crabs.
■ Discharge tank wastes and marine sanitation devices at pump-out stations only.
■ Place a bilge pillow (an oil-absorbing sponge) in your bilge to remove oil.
■ Avoid riding PWCs in quiet, secluded areas. They are the only place left for wildlife to seek refuge.
■ Never operate in less than 18 inches of water.
■ Obey fishing and crabbing regulations. There are $500 fines for undersized specimens.

**Boating Accident Report Form**

**Boating Accidents and Casualties …**

**What the Law Requires You To Do**

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

■ The vessel operator, or the owner if the operator cannot submit a report, must report accidents to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MDNR).
  * The operator must report the accident to the MDNR within 48 hours if a person dies, a person disappears, or a person receives medical treatment beyond first aid.
  * The operator must report the accident to the MDNR within 10 days if damage to the vessel and/or other property is $2,000 or more or if there is complete loss of a vessel.

■ If a vessel with Maryland registration is involved in an accident on waters outside Maryland and the accident results in the death, disappearance, or injury of any person or in property damage of $2,000 or more, the operator or owner must report the accident to the MDNR within 30 days. This does not exempt the operator or owner from reporting requirements in the jurisdiction where the accident occurred.

■ Accidents should be reported on accident report forms available from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

**Enforcement**

Maryland Natural Resources Police officers enforce the boating laws of Maryland. Patrol vessels can be identified by the blue emergency light, the “POLICE” identification on the side of the vessel, and the uniformed officers on board. The U.S. Coast Guard also has enforcement authority on federally controlled waters.

■ Officers have the authority to stop and inspect a vessel to determine whether the vessel is properly registered, numbered, and equipped.

■ On the immediate approach of a patrol vessel using a flashing blue light, a vessel operator, unless otherwise directed by the officer, must yield the right-of-way, stop their vessel, and stay in that position until the Natural Resources Police vessel has passed.

■ Failure to stop and/or permit boarding or inspection may subject the operator or owner to a penalty of up to $2,000.

■ An operator of a vessel may not elude or attempt to elude a police officer who gives a visual or audible signal to the operator to stop.

*Help stop marine theft!*

Report all thefts to the Natural Resources Police by calling 410-260-8888