Your Vessel’s Title, Registration, and Registration Decals

- On Washington waters, you must have a Washington title, current registration certificate, and current registration decals to operate or moor a vessel. Exceptions to registration and titling are:
  - Vessels that are not propelled by a motor (canoes, kayaks, etc.) and sailboats under 16 feet in length without a motor.
  - Vessels that are less than 16 feet in length and have a motor of 10 horsepower or less and are used on non-federal waters only. All motorboats of any size or horsepower that are used on waters under federal jurisdiction must be registered.
  - Properly registered vessels owned by residents of another state or country that use Washington waters for 60 days or less.

- Your boat’s registration number provides identification if the boat is in an accident, is overdue, or is missing. If a boat is lost or stolen, the vessel’s registration number can be used to return the boat to its owner. A portion of the annual registration fee is returned to local agencies to support boating safety education and enforcement.

- To obtain a title, a registration certificate, and registration decals for your vessel, you must present the proper application form, fees, and proof of ownership at your county auditor or vehicle licensing subagent office.

- The wallet-sized registration information must be on board and available for inspection by an enforcement officer whenever the vessel is operated on the water.

- The registration number and registration decals must be displayed as follows.
  - Number must be painted, applied as a decal, or otherwise affixed to the forward half of each side of the vessel, placed to be clearly visible.
  - Number must read from left to right on both sides of the bow.
  - Number must be in at least three-inch-high, bold, vertical, BLOCK characters.
  - Number’s color must contrast sharply with its background.
  - Letters must be separated from the numbers by a space or hyphen: **WN 3717 ZW** or **WN-3717-ZW**.
  - No other numbers may be displayed on either side of the bow.
  - Current year decals only must be affixed on each side of the bow, toward the stern of the registration number and in line with 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

- A vessel’s registration is valid through June 30. It must be renewed beginning July 1 of each year. To sign up to receive e-mail renewal reminders for a vessel, trailer, or vehicle, visit [www.dol.wa.gov](http://www.dol.wa.gov). Click on “Get e-mail renewal reminders” under “Vehicle and Boat Registration” on the home page.

- The owner of a registered vessel must notify the Department of Licensing within 15 days if any of these events occur:
  - The vessel is abandoned, destroyed, lost, or stolen or …
  - The owner’s address changes or …
  - The registration card is lost or destroyed.

- The owner of a registered vessel must notify the Department of Licensing in writing, on the appropriate form, within five business days of the date of sale or transfer of the vessel.

- Larger recreational vessels (five net tons or larger) 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 also must be registered in Washington and display current registration decals, but are not required to display the registration number.

Registration Certificate

The registration information shown above must be carried on board whenever the vessel is operated. Cut out this wallet-sized registration information from the lower left-hand corner of the Vessel Registration Certificate.

moor

To keep a vessel in place by setting anchor or tying the vessel to a fixed object or buoy
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.
- Are required when applying for Washington registration.
- 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

Age Requirements and Restrictions


- Persons under 12 years of age may not operate a power-driven vessel with an engine that is 15 horsepower or more.
- Persons 12 years of age or older may operate a power-driven vessel with an engine that is 15 horsepower or more if they have a Boater Education Card (see below).
- Persons 14 years of age or older may operate a personal watercraft (PWC) if they have a Boater Education Card (see below).
- It is illegal to lease, hire, or rent a personal watercraft to anyone under 16 years of age.

Boater Education Card Requirements

All boaters, unless exempt, must have a Washington Boater Education Card. For additional information about obtaining a Boater Education Card, including a complete list of exemptions, visit www.boatered.org.

Before operating a vessel powered by 15 horsepower or more, all boaters 12 years of age or older and born on or after January 1, 1955, must:
- Pass an approved boating safety education course or equivalency exam and...
- Obtain a Boater Education Card.

Persons exempted from the boater safety education requirement include:
- Any person born before January 1, 1955
- Any person 12 years of age or older who is operating a power-driven vessel with an engine that is 15 horsepower or more and is accompanied by and under the direct supervision of a person 16 years of age or older who has a Boater Education Card
- Any person at least 14 years of age who is operating a rented, chartered, or leased power-driven vessel with an engine that is 15 horsepower or more (other than a personal watercraft) and who completes and carries on board an approved motor vessel safety operating and equipment checklist (valid during the rental period only)
- Any person at least 16 years of age who is operating a rented, chartered, or leased personal watercraft and who completes and carries on board an approved motor vessel safety operating and equipment checklist (valid during the rental period only)
- Any person who is a non-resident and who operates on Washington waters for 60 consecutive days or less
- Any person who is a non-resident and holds a current, approved out-of-state or out-of-country boater safety education certificate or card
- Any person who has purchased the vessel within the last 60 days and has a bill of sale in his or her possession
- Operators of government vessels, persons with a valid WDFW commercial fishing license, and persons with a valid USCG marine operator's license
- Vessel operators who are required to have a Boater Education Card must carry the card on board the vessel.
- Unlike a driver's license which must be renewed, a Boater Education Card never expires.

Hull Identification Number

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manufacturer’s Hull Serial Date of Model Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification Code (MIC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hull Serial Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Manufacture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model Year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All vessels used on the waters of Washington State must have an HIN. If your vessel has no HIN, you can apply for one at any vehicle/vessel licensing office. Visit www.dol.wa.gov for locations.

Registration Questions?

Contact the Washington Department of Licensing:
- Call: 360-902-3770, option 2
- Fax: 360-902-4089
- E-mail: titles@dol.wa.gov
- Write: Department of Licensing
  Vessel Licensing
  P.O. Box 9909
  Olympia, WA  98507-8500

Replacing a Lost or Stolen Card

If your Boater Education Card is lost, damaged, or stolen, a replacement card is available for $5.00. To get your replacement card, visit www.boatered.org and follow the instructions for “Replacing a card.”

Washington Boater Education Card

Persons required to have a Boater Education Card must carry it on board whenever operating. Marine law enforcement officers are trained to enforce the Boater Education Card requirement and will issue a citation to boat operators who do not have their card. The fine for the first offense is $97. A third violation within one year could result in a criminal penalty with a higher fine.

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Unlawful Operation of a Vessel

Washington law designates the following dangerous operating practices as illegal.

- **Negligent Operation** is operating a vessel in disregard of careful and prudent operation, or in disregard of careful and prudent rates of speed in a manner that unduly or unreasonably endangers the life, limb, property, or other rights of any person. This includes:
  - Not paying attention to the operation of the vessel
  - Failing to keep a proper lookout
  - Failing to follow the navigation rules
  - Causing danger from the effects of the vessel’s wake (see sidebar)
  - Allowing passengers to ride on the bow, gunwales, or transom of a vessel not equipped with adequate railings to prevent falls overboard

- **Reckless Operation** is operating carelessly in a willful and wanton disregard of the rights, safety, or property of another person. It includes:
  - Weaving in and out of other vessels, docks, or buoys
  - Playing “chicken” with another vessel
  - Operating in a marked “No Boats” area such as a swimming or dam spillway area
  - Teak Surfing (or Platform Dragging) is holding onto any portion of the exterior of the transom of a vessel (including the swim platform, swim deck, swim step, or swim ladder) for any amount of time while a power-driven vessel is underway or the engine is idling. Bodysurfing is swimming or floating on or in the wake directly behind a power-driven vessel that is underway or idling.
  - The Jenda Jones and Denise Colbert Safe Boating Act prohibits the operation of a motorboat while an individual is teak surfing, platform dragging, or bodysurfing.
  - The law does not apply to persons who are briefly on a swim platform, swim deck, swim step, or swim ladder while exiting or entering a vessel.
  - This law has been passed to aid in the prevention of carbon monoxide poisoning (read more in Chapter 5).
  - All new and used power-driven vessels that are sold within Washington (other than personal watercraft) must display an approved carbon monoxide warning sticker on the interior of the vessel.

- **Overloading or Overpowering a Vessel** is putting too much equipment on a vessel or equipping it with an engine that is too large and powerful, either of which can cause the vessel to capsize or swamp and put people into cold water.
  - Remember that it is unsafe and a violation to:
    - Load your vessel with passengers or cargo beyond its safe carrying ability or to carry passengers in an unsafe manner, taking into consideration the weather and other existing conditions at the time of operation, such as traffic or tides. Use your capacity plate (Chapter 2) to guide you.
    - Operate a vessel equipped with a motor that is overpowered beyond the vessel’s ability to be operated safely. Safe operation includes factors such as the type and construction of the vessel, your boating activity, and other conditions like the weather.
    - If it appears to an enforcement officer that the vessel is clearly overloaded or overpowered beyond safe operation and is in a hazardous condition, the officer may direct the operator to return to shore and correct the condition before continuing the voyage.

- **Assault by Watercraft** is operating a vessel in a reckless manner or while under the influence of alcohol or drugs and injuring another person with serious disfigurement or the loss of a body part or organ.

- **Homicide by Watercraft** is operating a vessel in a reckless manner or while under the influence of alcohol or drugs and causing the death of another person. It also is considered “homicide by watercraft” if a person dies within three years as a result of injury caused by a boating accident.

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**Remember …**

Personal watercraft operators must obey all boating laws and also must obey additional laws that apply only to PWCs (see page 34).

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

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

**Remember …**

Speed limits and zoned or restricted areas are determined by local ordinance in Washington. Talk to the marine patrol of your local sheriff’s office or police department before going boating.

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**WARNING**

Washington state law requires the owner or dealer to apply this sticker on the interior of the vessel where it will be visible to passengers. Decals are available from vehicle/boat licensing offices.

**Controlling Your Wake**

Wake is the wave a boat generates as it moves through the water. The wake disperses an amount of energy based on the boat’s speed and the amount of water the boat displaces.

- The wake created by a boat may endanger others.
  - A boat’s wake may rock, swamp, or capsize other boats.
  - Passengers also may be thrown off balance or overboard, leading to serious injury.
  - Unreasonable wakes also cause erosion of the shoreline, damaging important habitat.

- Each operator is responsible for the vessel’s wake. When a boat’s wake causes damage, you could face very serious consequences. Excessive boat wake may be enforced as Negligent Operation with a fine of $343. The operator also may be held responsible for the damage caused by a boat’s wake and face a civil lawsuit.

- To reduce the effects of your wake:
  - Slow down well in advance when you are passing within 300 feet of a small boat, the shoreline, or a marina.
  - Trim the drive or outboard to a vertical position when you are operating at “no wake speed.”
  - Shift in and out of gear as you proceed if your vessel produces a wake in idle gear.
Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC).

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

Washington law prohibits anyone from operating a vessel while intoxicated—that is, boat operation under the influence (BUI). This means it is illegal to operate any vessel, powered or unpowered, while under the influence of intoxicating liquor (alcohol) or any drug. Alcohol and drugs cause impaired balance, blurred vision, poor coordination, impaired judgment, and slower reaction times. Read more about the effects and risks of consuming alcohol in Chapter 5.

- Washington law states that a person is operating under the influence if he or she:
  - Has a blood or breath alcohol concentration of 0.08% or more by weight or ...
  - Exceeds the legal limit for boating under the influence of marijuana of 5.0 nanograms, which is consistent with Initiative 502 that made recreational use of marijuana legal or ...
  - Is under the influence of or affected by alcohol and/or any drug.

- Washington law establishes the following penalties for boat operation under the influence (BUI).
  - A person convicted of BUI may be imprisoned for up to 364 days, be fined up to $5,000, or be penalized with both imprisonment and a fine. In addition, the court may order the defendant to pay restitution for any damages or injuries resulting from the offense.
  - Officers with probable cause can ask the boat operator to submit to a breath test. For probable cause, officers often use operating violations for wake and for speed exceeding the posted limits.
    - If the operator refuses to take the breath test, the total fine could be up to $2,050.
    - An operator’s refusal cannot be used as evidence in a subsequent criminal trial.
  - If someone dies or is seriously injured as the result of another person boating while intoxicated, the convicted person also may be charged with a felony, punishable by imprisonment in a state correctional institution and a substantial fine.

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.

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.
  - When you are approaching any U.S. Navy vessel, you must slow to minimum speed within 500 yards of the vessel. Do not approach within 100 yards of a U.S. Navy vessel. If you need to pass within 100 yards of a U.S. Navy vessel for safe passage, you must contact the U.S. Navy 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 (PFDs)

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 (including non-motorized watercraft) must carry at least one USCG–approved Type I, II, or III life jacket for each person on board. Non-motorized watercraft includes vessels such as canoes, inflatable rafts, kayaks, and sailboats.
- In addition to the above requirement, vessels 16 feet in length or longer must have one USCG–approved throwable Type IV PFD on board and immediately accessible. Canoes and kayaks are exempt from this requirement.
- 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.
- Children 12 years old and younger must wear a USCG–approved life jacket at all times when underway in a vessel less than 19 feet in length, unless in a fully enclosed area.
- Each person on board a personal watercraft must wear a USCG–approved Type I, II, or III life jacket.
- Each person being towed behind a vessel must wear a USCG–approved Type I, II, or III life jacket.
- A Type V PFD may be substituted for other required PFDs if the Type V PFD is approved for the activity for which the PFD is being used and is being worn.
- Some local governments have additional requirements for wearing PFDs. Before you go boating, be sure to check for local regulations at www.mrsc.org/codes.aspx.

**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.

- 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
  - Vessel length of 26 feet or longer
  - Closed compartments where portable fuel tanks may be stored
  - Double-bottoms which are not sealed to the hull or which are not completely filled with flotation material
  - Enclosed 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 size and type symbols and the approval number.

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

* refers to a permanently installed fire extinguisher system

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

Boater’s Tip

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 Extinguisher Charge Indicators

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

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

Remember …

Keep bilges clean and free of trash in order to reduce the risk of fire.
Backfire Flame Arrestors

Because vessel 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 muffled adequately.

- Every vessel with an engine must be equipped with a muffler or underwater exhaust system that is in good working order and in constant operation to prevent excessive noise.
- A vessel must not exceed the following noise levels.
  - **Measured using a stationary test:** For engines manufactured before January 1, 1994, the maximum noise level is 90 decibels; for engines manufactured on or after January 1, 1994, the maximum is 88 decibels.
  - **Measured from the shoreline:** For all vessels, the maximum operational noise level is 75 decibels.
- You may not remove, alter, or otherwise modify a muffler or muffling system if the result is increased noise level.
- The use of a muffler cutout or a muffler bypass system is prohibited, except while engaged in organized racing events in an area designated for that purpose.
- To ensure the muffler is working properly and also protect against carbon monoxide poisoning, the vessel exhaust system should be inspected for wear, damage, and leaks. See Chapter 5 for more information.
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 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 long are exempt unless anchored in 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).

- VDSs are required to be carried on vessels when on Washington's coastal waters, on the Strait of Juan de Fuca east to Puget Sound, and on the Puget Sound/San Juan Island area of the state. (Contact your local U.S. Coast Guard Station for further information.) All vessels on coastal waters, regardless of length or type, are required to carry night signals when operating between sunset and sunrise. Most vessels on coastal waters 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.

- VDSs are not required to be carried on Washington's inland waters, but they are strongly recommended.

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

#### Pyrotechnic Visual Distress Signals
- Orange Smoke—Handheld
- Orange Smoke—Floating
- Red Meteor
- Day Signal
- 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, 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.

coastal waters

- The U.S. waters of the Great Lakes
- The territorial seas of the United States
- Waters (such as bays, sounds, harbors, rivers, inlets, etc.) which are more than two miles wide and are connected directly to one of the above
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.

Printed signals should follow all of the water safety rules.

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.

- A sound-producing device is required on all waters and must be audible for one-half mile.
  - Vessels less than 65.6 feet in length (including PWCs, sailboats, and manually powered vessels) are required to carry on board a mouth-, hand-, or power-operated whistle or horn, or some other means to make an efficient sound signal.
  - Vessels 65.6 feet or more in length are required to carry on board a whistle or horn, and a bell.

- No vessel may be equipped with a siren, except vessels used by law enforcement officers.

Other Equipment and Regulations

- **Diver-Down Flags**: Any vessel involved in diving operations where persons are scuba diving, skin diving, or snorkeling from a vessel must display a rigid replica of the Alfa flag to mark its diving operation. If operating at night, three all-round lights in a vertical line must be displayed where they can be seen best; the highest and lowest lights must be red with a white light in between. Vessels not engaged in diving operations should remain at a safe distance away from a displayed flag, preferably at least 200 feet away. Some county ordinances may have specific restrictions. Two types of diver-down flags are available.
  - 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 required and must be displayed on vessels whenever these vessels are restricted in their ability to maneuver by the diving operation. This flag indicates that the **vessel** is involved in a diving activity.
  - A rectangular red flag with a white diagonal stripe (divers flag) may be used to indicate the presence of a submerged diver in the area, but it does not meet the state and federal requirements for display.

- **Skier-Down Flag**: Washington law states that vessels towing person(s) on water skis, a wakeboard, an inner tube, or any other similar devices must carry and use a bright red or brilliant orange skier-down flag, at least 12 x 12 inches in size and mounted on a pole at least 24 inches long, whenever the towed person(s) is preparing to ski or has fallen into the water. Remote-operated personal watercraft (PWCs designed to be operated by a towed person) must have a skier-down flag attached to the PWC.

- **Local Regulations**: Many Washington waterways have specific equipment and operational restrictions in addition to those covered in this chapter. Be sure to check with the sheriff’s office or police department for local regulations before you go boating. Many local boating ordinances can be found at [www.mrsc.org/codes.aspx](http://www.mrsc.org/codes.aspx).

Requirements Specific to Personal Watercraft (PWCs)

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

- Everyone on board a PWC must **wear** a U.S. Coast Guard–approved personal flotation device (life jacket). Inflatable PFDs and most Type II life jackets are not recommended for persons riding on PWCs. Impact-rated PFDs offer more protection.

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An operator of a PWC equipped with a lanyard-type ignition safety switch must attach the lanyard to his or her person, clothing, or PFD. It is unlawful to remove or disable an ignition safety switch that was installed by the PWC manufacturer.

- PWCs may be operated during the hours between sunrise and sunset only.
- You must be at least 14 years of age to operate a personal watercraft legally.
- It is illegal to lease, hire, or rent a personal watercraft to anyone under 16 years of age.
- PWCs must be operated in a reasonable and prudent manner. For example, it is illegal to:
  - Weave your PWC recklessly through congested waterway traffic.
  - Jump the wake of another vessel unreasonably close to that vessel or when visibility around the vessel is obstructed.
  - Maneuver a PWC such that you must swerve at the last possible moment in order to avoid a collision.
  - Operate a PWC while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
  - Chase, harass, or disturb wildlife, birds, or marine mammals.

**Towing a Person With a Vessel Legally**

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

- Every vessel towing a person(s) on water skis or other devices must have on board, in addition to the operator, a person capable of observing the person(s) being towed and reporting their progress to the operator. The observer must:
  - Continuously observe the person(s) being towed and …
  - Tell the vessel operator when the person(s) is no longer being towed and …
  - Display a skier-down flag whenever a person is in the water after falling or while preparing to ski. The flag must be displayed so that it is visible from all directions. The flag should not be displayed when the person is skiing or is out of the water.

- Every person being towed behind a vessel on water skis or other devices must wear a U.S. Coast Guard–approved personal flotation device (life jacket). Inflatable PFDs and most Type II life jackets are not approved for persons being towed, and are not designed for impact at higher speeds.

- Everyone engaged in water-skiing—the operator, the observer, and the towed person(s)—must conduct themselves in a safe manner that does not endanger other persons or property. Reckless operation includes cutting close to another boat, a dock, a person, or the shoreline.

- It is illegal for vessels to tow a person(s) on water skis or any other device during the period from one hour after sunset until one hour before sunrise.

- If towing a person on water skis or other devices, the vessel must be rated to carry at least the number of persons on board plus those being towed. You may not exceed the vessel's safe carrying capacity.

**Requirements Specific to Paddleboards**

The U.S. Coast Guard classifies paddleboards as vessels. 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 headlamp with a white light
  - Visual distress signals when used on coastal waters

Remember …

As an owner of a PWC, you are legally responsible if you authorize or knowingly permit the PWC to be operated in violation of Washington 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 Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission:
- Call: **360-902-8555**
- E-mail: boating@parks.wa.gov
- Visit **www.boatered.org**

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 Washington, which is found in the Revised Code of Washington, Washington Administrative Code, and federal law.
Waste, Oil, and Trash Disposal in Washington and Federal Waters

It is illegal to discharge waste, oil, or trash into any Washington inland or coastal 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 vessel with installed toilet facilities, it must have an operable marine sanitation device (MSD) on board and be designed to prevent discharge into the water.

- There are three types of MSDs.
  - Types I and II MSDs treat waste with special chemicals to kill bacteria. When in waters where treated sewage cannot be dumped overboard (for example, any freshwater body of water), these MSDs must have the “Y” valve secured so that it 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 in a closed position.
  - Type III MSDs provide no treatment and are either holding tanks or portable toilets. Collected waste should be taken ashore and disposed of in a pump-out or dump station or in an onshore toilet.
- 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.
- Discharging treated sewage into coastal waters is permitted but discouraged. Avoid flushing your vessel’s toilet in small bays, in marinas, and near shellfish beds.
- Untreated sewage (even if it has been dosed with a deodorant product) CANNOT be discharged into inland or coastal waters.
- A No Discharge Zone (NDZ) is an area of water where discharging treated or untreated sewage from boats is prohibited. Currently, Washington does not have any No Discharge Zones.
  - The Washington Department of Ecology has decided to send a draft petition to the Environmental Protection Agency to establish an NDZ in all or parts of Puget Sound.
  - If an NDZ is established, all vessels operating in that area must retain sewage in a holding tank and discharge it properly on shore.
  - For more information, visit [www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/nonpoint/CleanBoating/nodischargezone.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/nonpoint/CleanBoating/nodischargezone.html)

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 waters or waters under federal control. 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. It must notify passengers and crew about the discharge restrictions in the Marine Pollution Act (MARPOL). Obtain a placard from a marine supply store or from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Marine Debris Information Office, 1725 DeSales Street N.W., Suite 500, Washington, DC 20036.

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 into or upon the navigable waters and contiguous zones of the U.S. Using soap as a dispersant on an oil spill is also illegal. Violators may be fined up to $10,000 per day by the state. Federal fines also may be given.

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

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

You must notify the National Response Center and the Washington State Department of Emergency Management immediately if your vessel discharges oil or hazardous substances in the water (see section below for phone numbers). 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.

What To Do in Case of Discharge

If your vessel discharges oil or hazardous substances in the water, Washington law requires that you immediately call both of these emergency spill agencies (24 hours a day, 7 days a week):
- The National Response Center at 1-800-424-8802
- The Washington State Department of Emergency Management at 1-800-258-5990

For information on spill prevention and response, visit www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/spills/spills.html.

For information on where to recycle oil, call the Washington Department of Ecology, Recycling Hotline at 1-800-732-9253.
Boating Accident Report Form

Remember ...

Boating accidents in Washington often result in immersion in cold water (see Chapter 5). Be aware that the water is always cold in Washington. The average water temperature throughout most of Washington is 50˚ F year-round.

Law enforcement officers have the right to stop and board vessels in order to check for compliance with state laws.

Vessel Safety Inspection

Your local marine law enforcement officers will check that the required safety equipment is on board your vessel and in good condition. Vessels with all the required equipment receive a Marine Safety Inspection decal. This decal:
• Lets others know your vessel is equipped safely.
• Gives you the security of knowing your vessel is safe.
• Does not excuse operating violations.

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.
  ■ It is illegal for a boat operator involved in an accident to leave the scene of the accident without assisting those who were injured in the accident.
  ■ Anyone who renders assistance at the scene of a boating accident will not be held liable for any civil damages as a result of providing reasonable and prudent assistance.
  ■ The operator of a vessel involved in a boating accident or the owner of the vessel reporting for the operator must complete and submit a written boating accident report if:
    • A person dies or disappears from the vessel under circumstances that indicate death or injury or ...
    • A person is injured and requires medical treatment beyond first aid or ...
    • Damage to the vessel(s) or other property exceeds $2,000 or there is complete loss of a vessel.
  ■ The boating accident report must be submitted to the law enforcement agency that has jurisdiction where the accident occurred within the following timeframes.
    • Within 48 hours of the accident if:
      - A person dies within 24 hours of the accident or ...
      - A person is injured and requires medical treatment beyond first aid or ...
      - A person disappears from a vessel.
    • Within 10 days for all other accidents.
  ■ Accident report forms are available from the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, and the marine unit of local law enforcement agencies.
  ■ Additional information and the boating accident report form are available online at: www.parks.wa.gov/456/Vessel-Accidents.

Enforcement

Washington State Park rangers, Fish and Wildlife officers, city police officers, deputy sheriffs, and all other officers with law enforcement authority enforce the boating laws of Washington. U.S. Coast Guard officers also patrol and have enforcement authority on all waters under the jurisdiction of the United States.

■ Officers have the authority to stop and board your vessel and direct it to a suitable pier or anchorage 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 and allow the officer to come alongside.
  • The officer may warn you about a storm or caution you about the way you are operating your vessel.
  • Always remember that a key job of these officers is to ensure your safety on the water.