



Highlights from the

2021

Boating Regulations Recap

Information All Boaters Must Know

This article reviews key regulatory and safety information that boaters must know before venturing out on the water. The annual Boating Regulations Recap brochure also highlights new regulations that were recently approved by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC). The Boating Regulations Recap paired with the *2021 Pennsylvania Fishing Summary/Boating Handbook* provides boaters with comprehensive safety information to use when operating watercraft on Pennsylvania waterways.

Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs)

- A United States Coast Guard-approved wearable life jacket is required for each person on board. In addition, one throwable device is required on boats 16 feet in length or longer.
- Children 12 years of age and younger must wear an approved life jacket on Commonwealth waters when underway on any boat 20 feet or less in length and in all canoes and kayaks.
- All water skiers and anyone towed behind vessels, personal watercraft operators and passengers, and sailboarders must wear a life jacket. Inflatable life jackets are not acceptable for these activities.
- Wearable life jackets must be “readily accessible” or in the open where they can be easily reached. Throwable devices must be “immediately available” or within arm’s reach. A PFD that is stored in a protective covering or sealed in its original packaging is not readily accessible or immediately available.

Mandatory cold weather life jacket wear

From November 1 through April 30, boaters are required by law to wear life jackets on board boats less than 16 feet in length or any canoe or kayak. This regulation went into effect in 2012 and is intended to protect boaters from dangers of cold water shock if they fall into the water. Recreational boating fatalities that occur in Pennsylvania from November through April are primarily due to the effects of cold water immersion. When water temperatures are less than 70 degrees F, cold water shock is a major factor in boating fatalities. Victims who wear a life jacket when exposed to cold water have potentially life-saving advantages such as insulation from the cold, buoyancy for victims who are unable to tread water, and reduced risk of aspiration of water. In an effort to reduce the number of fatalities related to cold water

Mandatory boating education

HP OF MOTOR	RESTRICTIONS OF USE
PWC	All PWC (personal watercraft) operators, regardless of age, must have a Boating Safety Education Certificate. Persons 11 years of age or younger may NOT operate. Persons 12 through 15 years of age may NOT operate with any passengers on board 15 years of age or younger or rent a PWC.
0-25hp	None
Greater than 25hp	Persons 11 years of age or younger may NOT operate. Persons born on or after January 1, 1982, may not operate unless they have obtained and have in possession a Boating Safety Education Certificate.

immersion, the PFBC has amended regulations to require life jackets to be worn on small and unstable boats during the period most noted for cold temperatures.

Boating accidents

Boating accidents must be reported in writing by the boat operator or owner to the PFBC when:

- A person dies or disappears.
- A person is injured and requires advanced medical treatment beyond first aid.
- Damage to the boat and other property totals more than \$2,000, or there is a complete loss of the vessel.

Boating accident reports can be downloaded from the PFBC’s website at www.fishandboat.com/Transact/Forms/BoatingForms/Documents/pfbc260.pdf or obtained from any of our regional law enforcement offices.

Water-skiing and similar activities

- It is unlawful to operate a motorboat at any speed with a person or persons sitting, riding, or hanging on a swim platform (teak surfing) or swim ladder attached to the motorboat, except when launching, retrieving, docking, or anchoring the motorboat.
- It is unlawful to operate a motorboat at any speed when towing a person on water skis or other devices using a tow rope of 20 feet or less.
- Wake surfing is excluded from the 20-foot tow rope requirement.
- Boats engaged in the activity of wake surfing are limited to slow, no-wake speed when within 200 feet of the shoreline, docks, launch ramps, swimmers or downed skiers, persons wading in the water, anchored, moored or drifting boats, and other marked areas.
- It is unlawful to operate a motorboat propelled by an outboard motor, inboard/outboard motor, or water jet while a person is wake surfing in or on the wake of the motorboat, **unless the propulsion system is specifically designed by the manufacturer for that activity.**
- Skiing is illegal between sunset and sunrise.
- In addition to the operator, a competent observer must be in the boat in a position to observe the towed person.
- Conventional water-ski tow ropes may not exceed a length of 80 feet.

Specially regulated waters

Additional regulations such as speed limit and slow, no-wake areas affect boaters on specific waterways. Boaters should read all regulations posted on the bulletin boards at access areas. Know the waters you plan to boat before you go.

By understanding boating regulations and safety information, you will be prepared while on the water. Visit www.fishandboat.com. ☐

COLD WATER KILLS!



WEAR IT
National Safe Boating Council

WEAR YOUR LIFE JACKET!

Boaters are required by law to wear life jackets on boats less than 16 feet in length or any canoe or kayak during the cold weather months from November 1 through April 30.

LIFE JACKET AND THROWABLE DEVICE REQUIREMENTS:

- All boats must have a United States Coast Guard (USCG)-approved wearable life jacket on board for each person.
- Life jackets must be the appropriate size for the person intended. Check the life jacket label to ensure it is the appropriate size for the person wearing it. Also, make sure the life jacket fits. See the *2021 Pennsylvania Fishing Summary/Boating Handbook* to learn how to check for proper fit and for more information. Life jackets must be appropriate for the activity for which worn. See the USCG-approval label for information.
- Wearable life jackets must be “readily accessible.” This means life jackets should be stowed where the life jackets can be easily reached or in the open, ready for wear. Throwable devices must be “immediately available,” which means the devices shall be within arm’s reach of the operator or passenger while the boat is operated. A life jacket that is sealed in its original packaging is not readily accessible or immediately available.
- All life jackets must be in good and serviceable condition and legibly marked showing the USCG-approval number. This means the life jacket must be functional, free of tears or defects in the material, and all buckles, straps, zippers, and other closures must be operable.
- In addition to wearable life jackets, boats 16 feet and over must have a throwable device (ring buoy, life ring, or buoyant seat cushion) on board. Canoes and kayaks, regardless of length, are not required to carry a throwable device.
- A throwable device may not be used as a substitute for a wearable device.

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