



Summer Boating Safety Tips

National Association of State Boating Law Administrators

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As we kick off the summer boating season millions of Americans will be participating in recreational boating. While these excursions are full of fun and leisure, the number one priority for every boater should be safety. You may be enjoying time on the water with your spouse, family, children, or friends and it is important to take the necessary steps to make sure everyone on board stays safe.

Everyone has a different expectation of what the perfect day of boating is, but getting everyone home safe is certainly a part of it. Now is the time to focus on being prepared for the summer boating season. When you go boating, it is important to make sure that you and everyone with you, avoids potential dangers while on the water. Following the steps below can help you avoid trouble while out on the water. These safety precautions will allow you to have a worry-free day of boating.

1. BEFORE YOU GO

- Boating Safety Course
- Vessel Safety Check
- Pre-Departure Checklist
- Check the Weather
- File a Float Plan

2. WHAT YOU NEED

- Boating Essentials

3. ON THE BOAT

- Be Aware
- Boat Sober
- Life Jackets
- Navigation Aids



1. Before You Go

There are many things that boaters can do to prevent potential hazards or a breakdown before the day begins. Some of these include wearing a life jacket at all times, taking a boating safety course, receiving a vessel safety check, checking the marine weather forecast in your area, ensuring that all boating equipment is working properly and never bringing alcohol or drugs on board. Take the time to prepare before you depart to ensure you have a safe and enjoyable voyage.

- **Safe Boating Course** – Boater education can save lives and reduce accidents and injuries on the water. In the United States, almost all states and territories have mandatory educational requirements for operating a boat or PWC on state waters. Boater education courses help boaters prepare for a safe and responsible time on the water. Education courses cover state boating laws, navigation rules, what to do before you get underway, and other useful and important information to enhance your boating experience.



Visit www.nasbla.org/education/taking-a-boat-course to find courses in your state.

- **Vessel Safety Check** – Get a free vessel safety check before you hit the water. Many organizations provide free safety checks, such as the U.S. Power Squadrons, the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, and even your state boating agencies. Never pass up a free vessel safety check. These safety checks take approximately 15 – 30 minutes and go a long way to ensure the safety of your vessel.

Visit the [U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary webpage](#) to get more information about scheduling a vessel safety check.



- **Pre-Departure Checklist** – In addition to getting an annual Vessel Safe Check, it's always important to run through a boater pre-departure checklist before each boating trip. For a full boating safety checklist, [click here](#).

Here are some examples of things to check for:

- State Registration Documentation
- Lifejackets & Throwable Devices
- Visual Distress Signals
- Navigation Tools
- Magnetic Compass
- AM – FM Radio for weather reports
- Cellular Phone
- Fire Extinguishers (fully charged)
- Sound Producing Devices
- Navigation Lights
- VHF Marine Radio
- Flashlight and Batteries
- Search Light
- Check Fuel Amount
- Check Engine Fluids

- **Check the Weather** – Always check the weather forecast before boating. It is very important to be informed of the weather and potential storm warnings before you head out on the water. Not only can poor weather spoil a trip, but it can also cause an emergency situation out on the water.



Once on the water continue to check weather conditions and use a VHF radio to keep you updated on incoming storms or heat waves. Pay attention to the weather conditions surrounding you and be alert to wind, sky colors, sudden drops in temperature, and potential thunder to warn you of an incoming storm.

Visit the [National Weather Service's Marine Forecasts webpage](#) to see current weather conditions.

- **File a Float Plan** – Filing a float plan is an important step in preparing to go out on the water. Leave a float plan with at least one person on land so they know where to find you if needed. You should be able to rely on this person to notify the U.S. Coast Guard or local marine law enforcement if you do not return within a reasonable hour of expectancy.

[Visit the USCG Boating Safety website for a float plan template.](#)

- **Designate an Assistant Skipper** – Ensure that two people can safely and competently operate the boat. This person should be well-acquainted with your boat's handling, operations, and general boating safety. This is necessary if something were to happen to the primary operator and someone else needed to take over to return to shore.

2. What You Need

Although it is fun to have things like water skis, tubes, and kneeboards onboard, some items are more essential than others to keep you and your passengers safe.

Boating Essentials

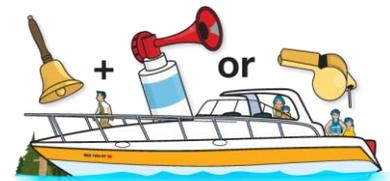
- **Life Jackets** – Select the right style life jacket for your boating activity. Read the label for intended use, size and other important information. Always have at least one U.S. Coast Guard approved life jacket per passenger on board. It is also recommended to have a minimum of two extra on board. [Click here](#) for more information on life jackets.



- **Throwable Flotation Aids** – A throwable device should be readily available to the operator of the boat in case a person accidentally goes overboard. It is designed to be thrown to a person in the water who should grasp and hold it until rescued. It is not designed or intended to be worn. Throwable devices include buoyant cushions, ring buoys, and horseshoe buoys. Most throwables do not include line. Attach several feet of floating line to a throwable device to equip a rescuer with a means to assist a victim in the water. Read the label and ensure the flotation device is U.S Coast Guard approved.



- **Visual Distress Signals (VDS)** – U.S. Coast Guard approved flares, orange signal flags, day signals, and electric distress lights are an essential part of boater safety. Always make sure to check the condition of these devices before you leave shore.
- **Sound Producing Devices** – Whistle, horn, or bell audible for one-half mile. In events where visibility is an issue out on the water, sound producing devices such as a whistle, horn, or bell are essential. These sound producing devices must be readily accessible to the passengers onboard. One suggested idea is to attach a whistle to each life jacket onboard.



- **Engine Cut-Off Device** – Many boating accidents involve operators or passengers who have fallen overboard. Wearing an engine cut-off switch lanyard or wireless engine cut-off device will shut the engine down if the operator is ejected or falls overboard. It may also prevent you from being run over by your own boat. An unmanned, out of control boat may circle ejected occupants, often running them over, and resulting in severe injury or death from a propeller strike. Wearing the engine cut-off device reduces the risk of a propeller injury and makes it easier to re-board the boat.
- **Emergency Locator Device** - Emergency locator devices are used to alert search and rescue services. Two of the most common devices include Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) or Personal Locator Beacon (PLB). An EPIRB is for one's boat and registered to the vessel, while a PLB is registered to the person and may be used on land as well as the water.
- **Emergency Boating Kit** - Even a well-maintained boat can experience unexpected trouble while out on the water. Therefore, it is recommended that you put together an Emergency Boating Kit to keep onboard. You can find different types of emergency boating kits at all major outdoor retail stores.
- **Drinking Water** – Stay hydrated. Boating is typically a recreational activity that takes place during the summer, or warm months throughout the year. That is why it is vital to make sure you have ample water for yourself and all passengers onboard.

3. On the Boat

When you are boating there are many things that can distract the operator and add unnecessary risk to your voyage. Operator inattention is the leading cause of recreational boating accidents. It is important for the operator and passengers to be aware of their surroundings while on the water. Alcohol and drugs also play a major role in boater fatalities. Keep your passengers safe by keeping alcohol and drugs off the boat. All passengers onboard should also wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved life jacket at all times. Following these tips will enhance your boating experience and your ability to have fun while out on the water.

- **Be Aware / Distracted Boating** – Always be aware of your surroundings while boating. It is critical that there be a proper lookout at all times while on the water. Always operate your boat at a safe speed, stay alert and avoid large vessels and other boats that can be restricted in their ability to stop or turn.
- **Boat Sober / Boating Under the Influence** - Alcohol use is the primary contributing factor in boater fatalities and can be easily avoided by choosing not to boat and drink. Do not bring or consume alcohol or drugs while on the water. Consuming alcohol negatively impacts vision, balance and reaction times and can cause dehydration. The effects of alcohol are heightened on the water compared to on land, with the environmental stressors such as wind, noise, and vibrations of the boat. Boating under the influence is illegal on all bodies of water and can lead to injuries, death, and serious legal and financial ramifications.



Visit [Operation Dry Water](#) for more information on boating under the influence and the impacts of alcohol use.



- **Life Jackets** – They float, you don't. Life jackets are a non-negotiable on any boating trip. [U.S. Coast Guard statistics](#) show that more than eighty percent (80%) of those who drowned were not wearing a life jacket. Don't let your family and friends be part of this statistic. Assign and fit each passenger with a life jacket prior to departure.
- **Follow Navigation Aids** - Remember to follow all buoys and navigation aids on the water. These devices have been placed there to guide you and ensure your safety. For more information on navigation aids, visit www.uscgboating.org/regulations/navigation-rules.php.



Everyone should enjoy boating and spending time on the water. Following these tips will go a long way toward a safe summer of boating. [Click here for sample social media posts](#) for **Summer Safe Boating Tips**.

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