

General Boating Regulations

REQUIREMENTS – A Coast Guard-approved wearable life jacket is required for each person on all boats in all waters. See additional life jacket requirements on this page. Motorboats (including boats powered by electric motors) must be registered, and they must be registered in their state of principal use. Boat operators born on or after January 1, 1982, who operate boats greater than 25 horsepower must have a Boating Safety Education Certificate in their possession. All PWC (personal watercraft) operators must have a Boating Safety Education Certificate in their possession. Persons 11 years old or younger may NOT operate a boat with greater than 25 horsepower or a PWC. Persons 12–15 years old may not operate a PWC with any passengers on board 15 years old or younger or rent a PWC. Unpowered boats (canoes, kayaks, rowboats, stand-up paddleboards, etc.) can be launched at Commission lakes and access areas or Pennsylvania State Parks and Forests if they display a boat registration, Commission launch use permit, or Pennsylvania State Parks launch permit or mooring permit. An unpowered boat may have a registration OR launch permit, but it is not required to have both. The Commission does NOT recognize launch permits from other states. A Commission launch permit can be purchased on the PFBC's website.

LIFE JACKET WEAR REQUIRED FROM NOVEMBER 1 TO APRIL 30



Boaters are required, by law, to wear life jackets on boats less than 16 feet in length or any canoe, kayak, or paddleboard during the cold weather months from November 1 through April 30. This requirement is intended to protect boaters from the dangers of cold water shock if they fall into the water.

The risk of an accident being fatal is significantly higher when the air and water temperatures are colder in late fall through spring. Over the last 15 years, cold water incidents represented only 8 percent of the boating-related accidents, but they resulted in 24 percent of the fatalities. Victims who are wearing a life jacket when exposed to cold water have potentially life-saving advantages.

MAKE SURE YOUR LIFE JACKET FITS!

For a life jacket to work properly, it needs to be worn and it should fit properly. A properly fitting life jacket is more comfortable (meaning you are more likely to wear it) and it functions better. Life jackets that are too small or large can ride up or even come off when you are in the water.

It's easy to check a conventional life jacket for proper fit—just put it on. The jacket should fit you snugly with all zippers, straps, ties, and snaps correctly secured. With a partner behind you, raise your arms like you are signaling a touchdown in a football game. Have the partner lift the jacket by the shoulders. The jacket should come no higher than your chin. If the jacket covers your face or comes off—that's what would happen in the water. In this case, tighten the straps or use a smaller size.



WEAR IT
National Safe Boating Council
Pennsylvania

WHO MUST WEAR A LIFE JACKET?

- Children 12 years old and younger on Commonwealth waters when underway in any boat 20 feet or less in length and in all canoes, kayaks, and paddleboards.
- On Pittsburgh District U.S. Army Corps of Engineers lakes (only), everyone in boats under 16 feet and in all canoes, kayaks, and paddleboards.
- All water skiers and anyone towed behind boats, in addition to personal watercraft operators and passengers, and sailboarders (windsurfers) are required to wear a life jacket. Inflatable life jackets are not acceptable for these activities.
- Boaters are required, by law, to wear life jackets on boats less than 16 feet in length or any canoe, kayak, or paddleboard during the cold weather months from November 1 through April 30.

LIFE JACKET REQUIREMENTS

- All boats must have a USCG-approved wearable life jacket on board for each person.
- In addition to wearable life jackets, boats 16 feet and over must have a USCG-approved throwable device (ring buoy, life ring, or buoyant seat cushion) on board. Canoes, kayaks, and paddleboards, regardless of length, are not required to carry a throwable device.
- Life jackets must be used in accordance with any requirements on the approval label.
- 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 fully functional, free of tears or defects in the material. All buckles, straps, zippers, and other closures must be operable.**
- Wearable life jackets must be “readily accessible,” which means that they are out in the open ready to wear or that they are stowed where they can be easily reached. Throwables devices must be “immediately available,” which means that the device shall be within arm's reach of the operator or passenger while the boat is operated and cannot be in a protective covering. A life jacket that is sealed in its original packaging is not readily accessible or immediately available.
- Life jackets must be the appropriate size for the person intended and adjusted to wear.
- A throwable device may not be used as a substitute for a wearable device.

BOATING AND ALCOHOL DO NOT MIX!

Alcohol use increases the chances of having an accident. Alcohol affects balance, coordination, and judgment. It is illegal to operate a boat while under the influence of alcohol or a controlled substance. Penalties include loss of boating privileges, significant fines, and imprisonment.

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