

# STATE OF COLORADO

## ***State-Specific Boating Safety Requirements***

### **SL 1. Law Enforcement Authority**

Colorado's boat and water safety laws are enforced by Colorado State Parks officers, county sheriffs and other law enforcement officers. The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) also has enforcement authority on all federally controlled waters.

When signaled by an enforcement officer, a vessel operator must stop and allow the officer to come alongside. The officer may warn about an approaching storm, caution the operator about the way in which the vessel is being operated, or inspect the vessel for safety equipment.

### **SL 2. Age Restrictions**

To operate a motorboat, including a personal watercraft (PWC), in the State of Colorado, the operator must be at least 14 years old. Those 14 or 15 years old must have successfully completed a state boating safety review and testing session and carry their certificate of completion on their person while operating a motorboat. No one 13 years of age or younger is authorized to operate a motorboat in Colorado.

### **SL 3. Boater Safety Education Requirements**

In order to operate a vessel, anyone age 14 or 15 years old, must successfully complete a state boating safety review and testing session and carry his or her certificate of completion on their person while operating a motorboat. In addition to a basic boating safety education, new boaters should take a course focusing on boat handling and operation. Boaters should also be aware that state boating safety laws are updated annually. Boaters must stay informed of changes to state boating safety requirements.

### **SL 4. Vessel Registration**

All motorboats and sailboats operating in Colorado for recreational purposes must be registered with the Colorado State Parks system on an annual basis. Exemptions include canoes, kayaks, non-motorized rafts, federally documented vessels, and vessels registered in another state if using Colorado waters for less than 60 days.

When you purchase a boat, you may operate it for up to 30 days if the dated bill of sale is onboard during vessel operation. Since registration may take up to four weeks, the application must be completed in a timely manner.

Registration renewal can be done by completing a registration form and mailing it to the Registration Office at 13787 S. Highway 85 Littleton, CO 80125, or by visiting the Colorado State Parks web site at <http://parks.state.co.us> and renewing online. Registration forms are mailed to previous registrants late in the year. Call (303) 791-1920 for more information.

### **SL 5. Maximum Loading and Horsepower**

When loading a vessel, the maximum capacity listed on the vessel's capacity plate must not be exceeded. This plate is attached to the vessel by the boat manufacturer and is usually located near the operator's station or on the vessel's transom. This plate states the maximum weight capacity or maximum number of people the vessel can safely carry, weather conditions permitting.

Overloading a boat and exceeding the limits listed on the capacity plate may cause an accident. When boarding a small boat, don't attempt to step aboard carrying heavy or bulky items. Instead, the gear should be handed to someone already seated in the boat and then boarding can proceed safely.

## **SL 6. Equipment and Lighting Requirements**

The USCG sets minimum safety standards for vessels and associated equipment. To meet these standards, some of the equipment must be USCG-approved. All boats operating on Colorado waters must carry and, if required, have in operation, acceptable personal flotation devices (PFDs), visual distress signals, fire extinguishers (whose number and type depend on boat size), sound producing devices, backfire flame arrestor, ventilation systems, and navigation lights as required by federal law. If a boat manufacturer installs the safety equipment, it should not be assumed that the vessel is properly equipped at time of purchase. Boat owners are responsible for ensuring that his or her vessel meets USCG regulations in accordance with vessel size and the waters in which the vessel is being operated. To review the federal requirements for safety equipment, refer to Chapter 2 of this course.

### **Personal Flotation Devices**

A vessel under 16 feet must be equipped with one USCG-approved Type I, II or III PFD for each person onboard or being towed on water skis. Vessels greater than 16 feet must carry, in addition to the PFD requirements for smaller vessels, one throwable Type IV device. All PFDs must be USCG-approved, in serviceable condition, the proper size and fit for the intended wearer and must be easily accessible or worn if required.

#### Mandatory PFD Usage

As of July 1, 2003, youth ages 12 and under must wear a PFD when the vessel is on the water, unless they are in an enclosed cabin or below deck.

Note: Type V hybrid PFDs may be substituted in some cases for a Type I, II or III device, but it must be worn whenever the vessel is underway to be considered USCG-approved. Type V PFDs cannot be used on PWCs or for activities such as water skiing. Before using, check the label of the Type V PFD for a list of approved activities. Type V PFDs are also not permitted to be worn by anyone under the age of 16.

### **Fire Extinguishers**

All vessels operated on Colorado waters must adhere to federal requirements for the number of fire extinguishers to be carried on each vessel. All fire extinguishers must be labeled as USCG-approved and must be in serviceable condition. To review federal fire extinguisher requirements, refer to Chapter 2 of this course.

### **Visual Distress Signals**

Visual Distress Signals are required for vessels operating on coastal or ocean waters only. They are not required for vessels operating on Colorado state waters.

Note: Coastal waters means the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, and all bays sounds, harbors, rivers, inlets, etc., where any entrance is over two miles wide to the first point where the distance between shorelines narrows to two miles.

### **Sound Producing Devices**

To avert collisions or signal intentions, all vessels must be equipped with a sound-producing device capable of making an efficient sound signal during periods of limited visibility. Vessels under 40 feet long must have onboard a whistle or horn. Vessels larger than 40 feet long must be equipped with a whistle or horn and a bell.

### **Backfire Flame Control**

All vessels operated on Colorado waters must meet federal requirements for backfire flame arrestors. All devices must be USCG-approved. To review federal backfire flame arrestor requirements, refer to Chapter 2 of this course.

## **Ventilation Systems**

All vessels operated on Colorado waters must meet federal requirements for ventilation systems. All ventilation systems must be USCG-approved. To review federal ventilation system requirements, refer to Chapter 2 of this course.

## **Lighting Requirements**

All vessels operated on Colorado waters must meet federal requirements for the display of navigation lights. All navigation lights must be USCG-approved. To review federal navigation light requirements, refer to Chapter 2 of this course.

## **SL 7. Marine Sanitation Devices**

In the State of Colorado it is unlawful to operate a boat equipped with a marine sanitation device unless the water closet is self-contained and incapable of discharging directly into the water. Depositing or discharging human waste or other refuse into the water is prohibited.

## **SL 8. Muffling Devices**

To reduce noise, motorboat engines must be equipped with factory-installed mufflers, exhaust water manifolds or other effective muffling system. Exemptions include motorboats competing in a race or regatta. The phrase "adequate muffling" means that motor exhaust is so muffled or suppressed at all times that excessive noise is not generated.

It is unlawful to operate a vessel on Colorado waters with a sound level greater than 86 decibels on the "A" weighted scale when measured from a distance of 50 feet or more from the vessel. A vessel operator may be ordered off the water upon failure to submit to sound level testing procedures.

## **SL 9. Boating Accidents**

If a boat is involved in an accident, the operator must give necessary assistance to the other vessel and passengers, as long as it will not personally endanger the operator, his or her passengers, crew or the vessel. The operator must also give his or her name, address, and the identifying number of his or her vessel to anyone injured in the accident and to the owner of any damaged property.

A vessel operator involved in a boating accident must file an accident report within five days if the accident resulted in:

- Loss of life or disappearance from a vessel,
- An injury that required medical treatment beyond first aid, or
- Property damage in excess of \$500 or complete loss of vessel.

Accident reports must be submitted to:

**Colorado State Parks**  
**13787 S. Hwy. 85**  
**Littleton, CO 80125**

Anyone who fails to file this report is guilty of a misdemeanor, and upon conviction will be punished by law. However, this report will not be used as evidence in any trial, civil or criminal, arising out of the accident.

## **SL 10. Vessel Speed Restrictions**

Exceeding the speed posted or charted in a specific zone or area is prohibited. It is unlawful to operate a motorboat above no-wake speed in posted no-wake zones. Under all other circumstances, speed must be reasonable and proper considering the prevailing conditions. Vessel speed must not exceed 40 miles per hour at any time, except during authorized race events or in the event of patrol vessels operating in emergencies.

### **SL 11. Mooring to Markers or Buoys**

It is unlawful to moor or attach a vessel to any buoy or navigation aid, other than a mooring buoy, placed in the water by proper authority as aids to navigation or to mark restricted areas. It is also unlawful to remove, destroy, or damage any marker or buoy.

### **SL 12. Reckless and Careless Operation**

It is unlawful for anyone to operate a vessel in a careless or imprudent manner without due regard for zoning, traffic, and other attendant circumstances. It is also unlawful to endanger any person, property, or wildlife. Examples of careless and/or reckless operation include:

- Excessive speed in regulated, prohibited or congested areas.
- Operating in a way that could cause an accident.
- Operating in a swimming area with bathers present.
- Operation of a PWC in a way that endangers life or property.
- Operating a vessel in an area legally marked off or set aside, such as a swimming area, or within 100 feet of a scuba diver's warning flag.
- Operating a vessel with passengers or cargo without required life vests (PFDs).
- Jumping the wake of another vessel and becoming airborne at an unsafe distance from the vessel.
- Maneuvering your vessel to throw a wake or spray as to splash another vessel.

Anyone who operates a boat in a careless is guilty of a petty offence that is punishable by a fine of \$100. Anyone who operates a boat in a reckless manner is guilty of a misdemeanor. Upon conviction, he or she must be punished by a fine of not less than \$200 or more than \$1,000, or by imprisonment in the county jail for not more than one year, or by both such fine and imprisonment.

### **SL 13. Interference with Navigation**

Vessel operators should be considerate of other watercraft operators even when stopping to anchor or moor. It is unlawful to:

- Anchor a vessel in the traveled portion of a river or channel that will prevent or interfere with any other vessel passing through the same area.
- Obstruct a pier, wharf, vessel ramp or access to any facility.
- Place an obstruction in the water that is dangerous to other's navigation.
- Cut loose any vessel that is moored or at anchor without the permission of the owner.

### **SL 14. Boating Under the Influence**

Operating a vessel under the influence of alcohol or a controlled substance is prohibited. In the State of Colorado, a person is considered under the influence if his or her:

- Blood alcohol concentration is 0.10 or more grams per one hundred milliliters of blood, or
- 0.10 or more grams of alcohol per 210 liters of breath at the time of the commission of the alleged offense, or within two hours after operating a motorboat or sailboat, if the evidence establishes beyond a reasonable doubt that the person did not consume any alcohol between the time of vessel operation and the time of testing.

### **SL 15. Mandatory Violator Education**

The State of Colorado does not currently have any regulation requiring mandatory boating safety education for violators of boating laws.

### **SL 16. PWC Regulations**

PWCs are those vessels (boats) designed for operation by a person sitting, standing, or kneeling on the craft rather than sitting or standing inside the vessel. PWCs include, but are not limited to, jet skis, wet bikes, wave runners and similar craft. PWCs are jet boats and engineered differently than most other boats. Water forced out through the steerable nozzle

controls the direction of the boat. If you release the throttle or shut off the ignition, all steering control will be lost. Boaters should avoid being stranded by carrying a full fuel reserve tank when operating a PWC. All PWC operators and passengers must wear a USCG-approved PFD.

The following PWC regulations apply in Colorado:

- Operation of a PWC from one-half hour after sunset to one-half hour before sunrise is prohibited.
- Operators and passengers of PWCs must wear a USCG-approved PFD of the appropriate size.
- Emergency engine shut-off lanyards must be used if the vessel is equipped with them.
- Do not operate a PWC carelessly and/or recklessly by becoming airborne while crossing the wake of another vessel at an unsafe distance, unsafely weaving through traffic, or operating at such a speed and proximity to another vessel that the operator of either vessel must swerve or abruptly cut speed to avoid a collision.
- Operators must be at least 14 years old to operate all motorboats, including PWCs.

Youth ages 14 and 15 may operate a PWC if they successfully complete a boating safety course approved by Colorado State Parks and carry their certificate on them when operating.

### **SL 17. Water Ski Regulations**

In Colorado, it is unlawful to operate a vessel for towing a person on water skis, aquaplanes, surfboards, or similar device, unless there is in such vessel a person, in addition to the operator, in a position to observe the progress of the person being towed, and capable of relaying messages to the operator. Water skiing between the hours of sunset to sunrise is prohibited. All those being towed from a vessel must wear a PFD.

Motorized vessels operating in designated water ski areas must travel in a counter-clockwise direction. When picking up a downed skier, the towboat must encircle the skier in such a way as to keep him in view of the vessel operator at all times. When a water skier or any equipment is down in the water, the operator or observer of the towing vessel must display an orange or red flag of a size not less than 12 inches square.

### **SL 18. Divers-Down Flag**

Federal navigation rules require vessels restricted in the ability to maneuver to display appropriate day shapes or lights. To meet this requirement, recreational vessels engaged in diving activities may exhibit a rigid replica of the international code flag "A" or a "Divers-Down" flag not less than one meter in height, or at night, display navigation lights 360 degrees red on top, white in middle and red on the bottom.

Scuba divers must display a Divers-Down flag when diving. A diver must place the flag at or near the point of submergence and all divers must stay within a 100-foot radius of the flag and must keep a distance of at least 100 feet from dam outlet structures. Vessels must stay 100 feet from the diver's flag.

### **SL 19. Liveries (Rental Agencies)**

The owner or operator of a vessel livery must keep a record for a 30-day period of the name and address of each person who hires any vessel, the identification number of such vessel, the departure date and time, and the expected date and time of return. The owner or operator of a vessel livery must ensure that all rented vessels are equipped and registered as required by law. Anyone who violates this regulation is guilty of a class 2 petty offense and, upon conviction, will be punished by a \$100 fine.

## **SL 20. Environmental Awareness**

### **Aquatic Nuisance Species**

Introducing non-native species into Colorado waters can upset the balance of the ecosystem. Aquatic nuisance species 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.

To prevent the spread of aquatic nuisance species, vessel owners and operators should take the following precautions:

- Inspect your vessel and trailer, removing any plants and animals you see before leaving the waterbody.
- Drain your motor, live well, and bilge on land before leaving the waterbody.
- Empty your bait bucket on land. Never release live bait into a waterbody or release aquatic animals from one waterbody into another.
- Rinse your vessel, trailer, and equipment.
- Air-dry your vessel and equipment for as long as possible.

### **Additional Information**

For more information on Colorado boating laws refer to the Colorado State Parks Department at <http://parks.state.co.us/Boating/RulesandRegulations/>. Also refer to Colorado Revised Statutes, Title 33 – Wildlife, Parks and Outdoor Recreation, Article 13 – Vessels Sections 33-13-101 *et seq.* at <http://198.187.128.12/colorado/lpext.dll?f=templates&fn=fs-main.htm&2.0>.