

## **STATE OF CONNECTICUT**

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

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

Several law enforcement agencies enforce Connecticut's boating laws and federal navigational laws. The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) has enforcement authority on all federally controlled waters. The Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has authority to issue boating rules and regulations. Municipal police officers, state conservation officers, town marine officers, lake patrolmen, and certified harbor masters are empowered to enforce state boating laws and regulations. In their jurisdiction, enforcement officers have authority to stop and board boats to check for compliance with federal or state law or to search without warrant, upon probable cause that other laws have been violated. Law enforcement vessels engaged in enforcement activities may display a flashing blue light or audible signal. When you see a vessel with flashing blue lights or hear an audible signal, slacken speed, yield right of way, or if signaled to do so, stop your vessel.

Conservation Officers patrol all navigable waters within the State of Connecticut and on Long Island Sound, as well as all other state waters on which recreational boating activities occur. Conservation Officers enforce state boating laws and regulations to ensure a safe and enjoyable boating experience for the many recreational boaters that enjoy Connecticut waterways.

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

It is unlawful in Connecticut for anyone under 12 years old to operate a vessel with a motor of more than 10 horsepower unless he or she is accompanied on board by a person at least 18 years of age who has been issued a Safe Boating Certificate. It is illegal for anyone under the age of 16 to operate a Personal Watercraft unless he or she is accompanied on board by a person at least 18 years of age who has been issued a Safe Boating Certificate or Certificate of Personal Watercraft (PWC) Operation. The only exception to this requirement is for those persons under the age of 16 who were certified to operate a PWC prior to March 9, 2004.

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

In Connecticut, boater education is mandatory; all boaters must complete a boating safety course or an equivalency exam as there is no minimum age for certification. Anyone who has a Boating Safety Certificate may operate any boat considering the exceptions stated in the previous section. Operators of a personal watercraft, regardless of state residency, must possess a Certificate of Personal Watercraft (PWC) Operation to operate on Connecticut waters. A person who holds a certificate from another state that has a reciprocal agreement with the DEP Commissioner may operate a vessel or PWC on Connecticut waters.

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

All boats with motors and sailboats powered by sail alone, 19.5 feet or longer, must be registered and numbered before launching. If you purchase a boat that is currently registered, you are responsible for seeing that it is registered in your name. Vessels are registered by the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles. Evidence of ownership must be submitted at the time of registration. Upon receipt of the application and fee, an identification number will be assigned and certificate of number/registration issued along with two validation decals. Registration is valid until April 30 of the following year. Connecticut vessel numbers are assigned to the boat as long as it is registered in the state. Vessels that are registered in Connecticut are not required to be titled.

Documented vessels and vessels numbered by another state, which are moored, docked, or operated for more than 60 days in Connecticut in any calendar year, must obtain a Connecticut certificate of number/registration and display a current Connecticut validation decal (but not a Connecticut vessel number) on both sides of the bow. In addition, the owner must obtain a Connecticut Safe Boating Certificate to operate the vessel on Connecticut waters.

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

The State of Connecticut does not have any maximum loading and horsepower requirements that are in addition to federal regulations. To review federal regulations, refer to the section on Capacity Plates included in Chapter 1 of this course. Connecticut law forbids, altering, defacing or removing the plate.

*The following information was approved by NASBLA and is included in Chapter 1 of the Boater101 Course:*

#### *Capacity Plates*

*It is required for all mono-hull boats under 20 feet built on or after November 1, 1972 to have a capacity plate approved by the USCG. In addition some manufacturers voluntarily install capacity plates on boats larger than 20 feet. This plate must be visible from the operator's station. The capacity plate lists a safe motor size, the maximum number of persons to be carried onboard, and the total weight the boat can carry including persons, motor, and gear. When operating your boat be sure to adhere to the restrictions listed on the capacity plate. Not only is it dangerous to overpower or overload a small boat, since they can swamp or capsize more easily, but it is also illegal. In many states, there are fines and penalties for exceeding capacity recommendations, including carrying more than the maximum number of people.*

*On boats with no capacity information label, use the following formula to determine the number of persons your vessel can safely carry in good weather conditions:*

*PERSONS (average 150 lbs. each) = Length (ft) x width (ft) divided by 15*

### **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 Connecticut waters must carry and, if required, have in operation, acceptable personal flotation devices (PFDs), visual distress signals, fire extinguishers, sounding 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**

The State of Connecticut has the following PFD requirements that are in addition to federal regulations:

- During the period from October 1st through May 31st, all persons onboard a canoe must wear a Type I, II, III, or V USCG-approved PFD. No operator or paddler is authorized to allow anyone on board the vessel who is not wearing such a device.
- A USCG-approved PFD must also be worn by anyone being towed behind a vessel.

- **Mandatory PFD Usage:** All children under the age of 12 must wear a USCG-approved PFD while on a recreational vessel that is underway, unless they are in an enclosed cabin or below deck.

Before choosing the proper PFDs to store on your boat, familiarize yourself with federal requirements for their use and potential shortcomings. For example, manually inflatable PFDs are certified as Type III. They require the wearer to pull an inflatable tab in order to work, so they will not be of any help to an unconscious wearer. The automatic PFDs are certified as Type V and must be worn to be legally counted. Inflatables cannot be used by persons under 16 years of age, persons under 90 pounds, or for high-speed water sports such as water-skiing or PWC operation or riding. As with all life jackets, be sure to read the label carefully to be certain that you are using it correctly.

### **Fire Extinguishers**

All vessels must be equipped with a Type B fire extinguisher(s) onboard if one or more of the following conditions exist:

- Inboard engine;
- Closed compartments where portable fuel tanks may be stored;
- Double-bottoms not sealed to the hull or which are not completely filled with flotation material;
- Closed living spaces;
- Closed storage compartments in which flammable or combustible materials may be stored; or
- Permanently installed fuel tanks (any tank where the removal of the tank is hampered by the installation of tie-down straps or clamps).

Approved types of fire extinguishers have the following markings on the label - "Marine Type U.S. Coast Guard-Approved," followed by the size, type symbols, and the approval number. Fire 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. If you need to refresh your memory on federal fire extinguisher requirements, refer to Chapter 2 of this course.

### **Backfire Arrestors**

Internal combustion engines may backfire. To safeguard against fire, all inboard motorboats with carburetion must have a carburetor backfire flame arrestor system on each carburetor.

### **Ventilation Systems**

All vessels operated on Connecticut waters must adhere to the federal requirements regarding ventilation systems. All ventilation systems must be USCG-approved. To review federal ventilation system requirements, refer to Chapter 2 of this course.

### **Visual Distress Equipment**

All recreational boats must be equipped with a minimum of three day and night visual distress signals, when used on coastal waters and the territorial seas, up to a point where a body of water is less than two miles wide (in Connecticut this means Long Island Sound, Fishers Island Sound, and the Lower Thames River). Visual distress signals carried aboard must meet federal requirements for the applicable class of boat. To review federal requirements regarding visual distress signals, refer to Chapter 2 of this course.

### **Sound Producing Devices**

Navigation Rules (part of Federal Law) require all boats to have some means of making an efficient sound signal. Every motorboat 16 feet or more in length shall be equipped with a

whistle or horn type sound producing device capable of producing a blast of two seconds or more in duration. On motorboats 16 feet or more but less than 26 feet in length such device shall be mouth, hand or power operated and audible for at least one-half mile. On motorboats 26 feet or more but less than 40 feet in length such device shall be hand or power-operated and audible for at least one mile. On motorboats 40 feet or more but less than 65 feet in length such device shall be power-operated and audible for at least one mile. Connecticut Law requires that every motorboat 26 feet or more in length shall be equipped with a bell capable of producing a clear bell like tone of full round characteristics.

### **Lighting Requirements**

Recreational boats must display their navigation lights as required by federal regulations at all times between sunset and sunrise, and during daylight periods of reduced visibility. Refer to the lighting requirements in chapter 2 of this course if you need to review these federal regulations.

### **SL 7. Marine Sanitation Devices (MDSs)**

The use of direct discharge toilets is prohibited inside the U.S. Territorial Seas Demarcation Line (often three miles from shore, including all of Long Island Sound). It is also unlawful to dump sewage from a portable toilet overboard.

All vessels with an installed toilet are required to have a USCG-approved Marine Sanitation Device (MSD) attached to the toilet. Refer to chapter 5 of this course to review the three types of MSDs and additional discharging requirements.

To further protect the environment, states are implementing "No Discharge Areas" with the approval of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Within these areas, the discharge of sewage, treated or untreated, is prohibited. In these areas, only a Type III system is legal. Currently, the following "No Discharge Areas" have been established in local waters by the EPA: Pawcatuck River, Little Narragansett Bay and Stonington Harbor, as well as the navigable reaches of the Hammonasset River, Menunketesuck River, Niantic River and the Thames River that drain into Long Island Sound and the Connecticut River within state boundaries.

The Federal Clean Vessel Act has directed funds collected from excise taxes on fishing tackle and fuel to construct, operate, and maintain pump out stations and dump stations for portable toilets. For more information about pump outs, call the Boating Division at (860) 434-8638.

### **SL 8. Muffling Devices**

To reduce noise, every motorboat must have an engine equipped with an effective muffling device. Muffler cutout devices are prohibited in Connecticut. The noise level limits are as follows:

- For engines made on or after January 1, 1993, emitted noise must not exceed 88 dB, and
- For engines made before January 1, 1993, emitted noise must not exceed 90 dB.

A Law Enforcement Officer who believes a motorboat is being operated in excess of the established noise levels may request the operator to submit the motorboat to an on-site noise level test. No person is allowed to sell a motorboat that does not operate in compliance with the established noise levels. Boaters should contact the Boating Division before selling a vessel exempt from muffling restrictions because it is used only in marine races.

### **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.

The operator of a vessel involved in a boating accident that results in any of the circumstances noted below shall IMMEDIATELY notify the nearest law enforcement agency and, within 48 hours after the accident, report the matter in writing on a form provided by the Department of Environmental Protection, Boating Division:

- The death of any person from whatever cause.
- The disappearance of any person from on board.
- The injury of any person sufficient to require medical attention beyond simple first aid.

Any accident in which the total damages to all property affected is in excess of \$500 must be reported by the operator within 5 days after the accident on forms provided by the Connecticut DEP, Boating Division.

The vessel operator must submit the report. If for any reason the operator cannot submit the report, the owner or survivor of the accident should initiate the report.

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

In Connecticut, speed is limited by law for certain conditions and areas; you must comply with posted regulatory signs.

It is unlawful to operate a motorboat at a speed in excess of slow-no-wake speed within 100 feet of shore, a dock, pier, float, or anchored or moored vessel, unless taking off or landing a water-skier. When within 100 feet of buoys marking a restricted swimming area or boat access area, vessels must only be operated at the minimum speed necessary to maintain steerageway.

When no limits are posted, you must operate the boat so it will not endanger others. Boat operators are responsible for damage caused by their wakes. The boat must be able to stop safely within the clear distance ahead. When passing near marinas, fishing areas, swimming areas, a vessel at anchor, or similar places, reduce speed.

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

It is unlawful to moor or attach a vessel to a beacon, light, buoy (except a mooring buoy) or any other navigational aid installed on public waters by proper authorities. It is also unlawful to tamper with, move, displace, damage or destroy any navigational aid.

Anchoring under a bridge, in a narrow channel or in congested water not designated as an anchorage area shall be deemed to be such interference, except in case of emergency.

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

Reckless operation is the failure to exercise the degree of care necessary to prevent endangering another person or their property. It can be the result of operator ignorance, carelessness, inattention, or indifference.

Reckless operation in the first degree is an offense committed when a person operates a vessel at such speed or maneuvers a vessel in such a manner as to result in death, serious physical injury, or damage to property in excess of \$1,000. A second-degree offense is one that endangers the life, limb, or property of another person. Any person guilty of reckless operation of a vessel in the first degree while under the influence of intoxicating liquor or any drug, or both, may be fined and/or imprisoned.

While underway in a motorboat, do not ride on the bow, gunwale, transom, or in any position that is obviously dangerous. In addition to being against the law and unsafe, riding on or hanging over the bow can interfere with stability and may restrict the operator's visibility. No operator of a vessel under power may allow any person to be on a decked-over bow of such vessel while underway unless the bow of the vessel is equipped with a handrail that encompasses the bow, and all persons on the bow are inward of such handrail. On vessels under power with open bows that are not decked-over, no operator may allow any person to sit or stand on the gunwale at the bow of the vessel while underway. These regulations do not apply to persons in or on the bow of vessels engaged in anchoring, mooring, or docking activities and proceeding at a dead slow speed.

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

It is unlawful to:

- Anchor a vessel in the traveled portion of a river, channel or other waterbody that will prevent or interfere with any other passing vessel.
- Obstruct a boat ramp, pier, wharf or access to any facility.
- Obstruct or mark the waters of Connecticut in a way that may endanger the operation of watercraft or conflict with the marking system prescribed by the State of Connecticut.

Operate or otherwise position a vessel, other object or any person in a way that would obstruct or impede the normal flow of traffic on the lakes of this state.

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

No person may operate a boat while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. An operator must be free from physical or mental disabilities that might interfere with the control of the boat. Water-skiing under the influence is also illegal.

By operating a boat or PWC on state waters, you have consented to a sobriety test if requested by a law enforcement officer. A person is considered under the influence of intoxicating liquor if the ratio of alcohol in the blood is eight-hundredths of one percent (0.08%) or more of alcohol, by weight. Persons who refuse to take a sobriety test or are convicted of boating under the influence may face the suspension of boating privileges and/or jail time.

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

Since all boaters are required to take boating safety education in the state of Connecticut, it is not required that violators of boating safety laws take an additional education class. Boating law violators will face punishment appropriate for the offense.

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

Connecticut law defines "personal watercraft" as any inboard powered vessel less than 16 feet in length that has an internal combustion engine powering a water-jet pump as its primary source of motor propulsion and which is designed to be operated by a person sitting, standing or kneeling on the vessel, rather than the conventional manner of sitting or standing inside the vessel.

Commencing June 23, 1993, it is unlawful to operate a PWC unless the operator has successfully completed a course in safe PWC handling approved by the DEP Commissioner and has been issued a Certificate of Personal Watercraft Operation by the DEP Commissioner.

PWCs are subject to the following operation restrictions:

- All persons aboard PWCs must wear a USCG-approved Type I, II, III, or V personal flotation device. No PWC operator may allow any person to be aboard who is not wearing such a device. Type V Inflatable PFDs are not allowed to be worn while riding on a PWC.

- PWC operation is prohibited between sunset and sunrise.
- No person may operate a PWC towing a water-skier and no person shall water-ski while being towed by a PWC unless:
  - The capacity label affixed to the PWC by the manufacturer indicates a carrying capacity of at least three persons: the operator, the observer and the skier,
  - There are handholds at or near the rear of the seat suitable for use by a rearward-facing observer, and
  - There is an observer 12 years of age or older facing the skier at all times.
  - The boat operator, observer and water-skier must obey all other water-ski rules.
- No person may operate a PWC at a speed in excess of 6 miles per hour within 200 feet of any dock, pier, float, or anchored or moored vessel. This does not apply when approaching or leaving shore or a dock, pier, float, or anchored or moored vessel for the purpose of landing or taking off. A person may operate a PWC in excess of 6 miles per hour when not within one hundred feet of the same objects.
- No person may operate a PWC at a speed in excess of 6 miles per hour within 200 feet of shore on any lake or pond.
- No person operating a PWC may cross or jump the wake of another vessel, when within 100 feet of the vessel creating such wake, in such a manner that the hull of the personal watercraft completely leaves the water.
- No person may operate a PWC equipped by its manufacturer with a device for shutting off the engine, known as the "kill switch," unless such a device is attached, by a lanyard, to the operator, his clothing, or his PFD in a manner which will shut off the engine in the event the operator is ejected from the PWC while underway.

### **SL 17. Water Ski (Towing) Regulations**

In Connecticut, water-skiers or any other person being towed behind a vehicle are required by law to wear a USCG-approved PFDs while being towed, except for those skiers who are engaged in barefoot skiing and are wearing a specifically designed "barefoot wetsuit" and those skiers who are engaged in trick skiing movements while wearing standard double trick skis at least 8 inches wide and not over 46 inches long, and being towed at not more than 20 mph using a tow rope not over 50 feet long. The water-skier's PFD must be made readily available aboard the tow vessel for each skier electing not to wear one under the above exceptions, in addition to those PFDs normally required to be aboard.

### **Ski belts and inflatable PFDs do not meet U.S. Coast Guard requirements for PFDs to be worn while water skiing.**

The operator of the boat towing a person(s) in the water is required to have a responsible observer at least 12 years of age to assist the operator and monitor the progress of the water-skier. The water-skier, observer, and the boat operator shall use hand signals for communication. The maximum length of a towline measured from the tow post to the skier's tow handle is 100 feet. No elastic component may be part of the towline. When not engaged in towing a water-skier, the rigid metal tow pole, often used for barefoot skiing, may either be removed from the boat or must be dismantled or folded and placed inside of the gunwale parallel to the center line of the boat. The operator of the vessel and the water-skier are responsible for operating in a manner that does not harm or strike another person or vessel. Water-skiing is forbidden between 1/2 hour after sunset until sunrise or when visibility is restricted to less than 100 yards. Operating a vessel over 6 miles per hour within 100 feet of shore is prohibited. Therefore, water-skiing in a narrow channel or river less than 200 feet wide is a violation. The towing of a person or persons on an inner tube without handholds is prohibited.

### **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.

In Connecticut, anyone involved in underwater swimming or diving is required to display a clearly visible red flag with a white diagonal stripe. The flag must be two-sided, not less than 13 inches high and 15 inches long. The white diagonal stripe must be reflectorized if the flag is to be used at night. No person may operate a vessel or cause any person on water skis to pass within 100 feet of a device marking the location of an underwater swimmer or diver. Under no circumstances shall a diver surface or swim more than 50 feet from this flag. In addition to being extremely dangerous, these are violations of the law.

No more than four divers may use the same Divers-Down flag unless it is displayed from a boat, in which case the number of divers must be limited to the legal capacity of the boat.

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

All liveries should provide renters with information on rules, laws, and basic navigation and boating safety for the state in which the rented vessel is operated.

Anyone operating a vessel other than a personal watercraft, as defined in section 15-140j, which is rented for a period of 14 days or less from a person or organization engaged in the commercial rental of vessels need not obtain a Safe Boating Certificate during the rental period. Persons or organizations engaged in the commercial rental of vessels must furnish to each rental customer literature on safety and rules of navigation as supplied by the DEP Commissioner.

### **SL 20. Other State-Specific Regulations**

Any town, by ordinance, may make local regulations respecting the operation of vessels on any body of water within its territorial limits. The DEP Commissioner may disapprove any ordinance, or part thereof, which he finds to be arbitrary, unreasonable, unnecessarily restrictive, inimical to uniformity or inconsistent with state boating policy.

**Marine parades, regattas, races, tournaments or exhibitions:** Written permission must be obtained from the DEP Commissioner at least 45 days in advance for any marine parade, regatta, race, tournament or exhibition to be held on state waters.

**Safety controls on the Housatonic River:** The DEP Commissioner shall prescribe, install and maintain suitable safety controls and warning devices on the approaches to the dams on the Housatonic River for the safety of boats using the same.

### **SL 21. Environmental Awareness**

#### **ZEBRA MUSSEL ALERT**

Zebra mussels have been found in Connecticut! (At publication date they have been found in East Twin Lake in Salisbury.)

Please do not transport these or other harmful organisms to other bodies of water. They clog power plants, industrial and drinking water intakes, foul boat hulls and engine cooling systems, and disrupt aquatic ecosystems.

Boaters using waters in western Connecticut should use extra care to avoid transporting water and aquatic vegetation that may contain Zebra mussels to new locations. In addition, be careful to avoid spreading nuisance plants like Eurasian Water-Milfoil.

To prevent the spread of Zebra mussels and other aquatic nuisance species anywhere in Connecticut, please be sure to:

- Completely drain all water from the boat.
- Inspect the boat, trailer, and equipment and remove all attached aquatic plants and animals.
- Leave all bait behind! Give it to someone fishing the same water body or dispose of it on land.
- Rinse the boat, trailer, and equipment with tap water.

### **Become a Clean Boater**

Practice these tips and join the growing number of boaters and marina operators who are making sound choices to improve their boating environment.

- Use less toxic propylene glycol antifreeze (usually pink).
- Use a dustless or vacuum sander and use a drop cloth to collect all paint chips, dust, and residue.
- Dispose of all maintenance products and chemicals properly. Bring them to local hazardous waste collection sites or ask your marina operator where to dispose of them.
- Wash your boat frequently with sponge and plain water.
- Use phosphate-free, biodegradable, and non-toxic cleaners.
- Avoid cleaners with bleach, ammonia, lye, or petroleum distillates.
- Never "top-off" or overfill your fuel tank.
- Leave 10% of the tank empty for fuel to expand as it warms up.
- Use absorbent material to catch drips from the fuel intake and the vent overflow.
- Don't use soap to disperse fuel or oil spills. It is illegal and more harmful to the environment.
- Slip a plastic bag over used oil filters to prevent drips when doing oil changes. Place absorbent material in the bilge and under the engine. Check them often. If the pad is saturated with gas, air dry, and reuse.
- If a pad is saturated with diesel or oil, boaters may double-bag the pads and discard them in the trash.
- Recycle cans, glass, plastic, newspaper, antifreeze, oil filter, and oil. Spent lead batteries may be recycled at the point of purchase of a new battery.
- Bring used monofilament fishing line to tackle shops for recycling.
- Handle sewage appropriately and support marinas that are environmentally responsible.

For information about the Clean Boater Program contact the Boating Division at (860) 434-8638; for the Clean Marina Program contact the Office of Long Island Sound at (860) 424-3034.

### **Additional Information**

For more information on Connecticut boating law refer to the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection Bureau of Outdoor Recreation at <http://dep.state.ct.us/rec/boating/index.htm>, Connecticut General Statutes Title 15 - Navigation and Aeronautics, Chapter 268 - Boating (Sections 15-121 to 15-176) at [http://search.cga.state.ct.us/dtsearch\\_pub\\_statutes.html](http://search.cga.state.ct.us/dtsearch_pub_statutes.html).