

STATE OF GEORGIA

State-Specific Boating Safety Requirements

SL 1. Law Enforcement Authority

Primary responsibility for enforcement of the Georgia Boat Safety Act is with the conservation rangers of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. However, all peace officers are also authorized to enforce the law.

SL 2. Age Restrictions

Those less than 12 years of age:

- May not legally operate a Class 1, 2, or 3 boat or a Class A boat powered by a motor of more than 30 horsepower
- May not operate a PWC
- May legally operate a Class A boat which is either non-motorized or powered by a motor of 30 horsepower or less only if they are accompanied by a competent adult.

Those 12 or 13 years of age:

- May legally operate a non-motorized Class A boat without restrictions
- May legally operate a Class A boat powered by a motor of 30 horsepower or less if they meet any of the following conditions:
 - Have passed a boating safety course approved by the Department of Natural Resources, or...
 - Are accompanied by a competent adult, or...
 - Are under direct supervision of a competent adult.
- May not legally operate a Class 1, 2, or 3 boat or a Class A boat powered by a motor of more than 30 horsepower.

Those 14 or 15 years of age:

- May legally operate a non-motorized Class A boat without restrictions
- May legally operate any boat if they meet any of the following conditions:
 - Have passed a boating safety course approved by the Department of Natural Resources, or...
 - Are accompanied by a competent adult, or...
 - Are under direct supervision of a competent adult.

Those 16 years of age or older:

- May operate any boat on the waters of Georgia if they have proper identification onboard.

Who May Operate a PWC

Those 12 to 15 years of age:

- May legally operate a PWC if they meet any of the following conditions:
 - Have passed a boating safety course approved by the Department of Natural Resources, or...
 - Are accompanied by a competent adult, or...
 - Are under direct supervision of a competent adult.

Those 16 years of age or older:

- May operate any boat on the waters of Georgia if they have proper identification onboard.

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SL 3. Boater Safety Education Requirements

The state of Georgia highly recommends that new boat operators take a boating safety course. Persons age 12-15 need to complete a boating safety course approved by the Department of Natural Resources in order to pilot vessels and PWCs in accordance with the age restrictions shown above. Courses approved by the Department of Natural Resources are NASBLA certified.

In addition to a basic boating safety course, new boaters should continue their education by taking a course that focuses on boat handling and operation. It is also important that boaters are aware that state boating safety laws are updated on an annual basis. Boaters are responsible for staying informed of any changes to state boating safety requirements.

SL 4. Vessel Registration

You must have a Georgia Certificate of Boat Registration and a validation decal to legally operate your boat or personal watercraft on public waters in Georgia. The only exceptions are:

- Sailboats under 12 feet in length
- Canoes, kayaks, rowboats and rubber rafts that have no mechanical propulsion (i.e., are paddled, poled, oared or windblown).
- Boats operated exclusively on private ponds or lakes.

Submit by mail the proper application and fee to "The Department of Natural Resources Office of Boat Registration" in order to obtain the Certificate of Boat Registration and validation decal.

The certificate (pocket-sized plastic card) must be onboard and available for inspection by an enforcement officer whenever the boat or PWC is operated.

The registration number and validation decal must be displayed as follows:

- Number must be painted, decaled or otherwise affixed to both sides of the bow.
- Number must read from left to right on both sides of the bow.
- Number must be in at least 3"-high block letters.
- Number's color must contrast with its background.
- Letters must be separated from the numbers by a space or hyphen: "GA 3717 ZW" or "GA-3717-ZW."
- No other numbers may be displayed.
- Decals must be displayed on each side of the bow, before the prefix letters of the registration number.

SL 5. Maximum Loading and Horsepower

Always check the capacity plate to determine the maximum weight capacity or the maximum number of people that the boat can safely carry. This plate is usually located near the operator's position or on the transom of a boat and near the stern of a PWC. Since not all PWC have a capacity plate, always follow the recommended capacity in the owner's manual and on the manufacturer's warning decal.

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SL 6. Equipment and Lighting Requirements

The state of Georgia adheres to all equipment requirements prescribed by the U.S. Coast Guard. These include, but may not be limited to (depending on boat class), personal floatation devices, navigation lights, visual distress signals, sound producing devices, fire extinguishers, ventilation systems, backfire flame arrestors, and muffling devices.

Georgia law requires all children under 10 years of age to wear a U. S. Coast Guard approved PFD while onboard any moving boat. This law does not apply when the child is in a fully enclosed cabin.

SL 7. Marine Sanitation Devices

All boats, including houseboats and floating cabins, equipped with a marine toilet must have a wastewater holding system to prevent the discharge of waste products into surrounding waters.

A marine toilet is considered to be any equipment for installation onboard a boat, which is designed to receive, retain, treat or discharge sewage and any process to treat such sewage. A "porta-potty" is not considered to be a marine toilet.

It is illegal for a boat to pump out sewage from a wastewater holding system or from a portable toilet or marine sanitation device into surrounding waters, except into an approved pump-out facility or into a sewer system located on dry land.

All boats equipped with a marine toilet must be registered with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. You will be issued a Marine Toilet Certificate decal, which must be affixed to the hull adjacent to the boat's registration number.

The one-time certification fee is \$5.00. No renewal of the certificate is required and it is transferable to any subsequent owner of the boat.

Boats equipped with a marine toilet:

- If operated on Lakes Allatoona, Blackshear, Blue Ridge, Clarks Hill, Hartwell, Russell, Seminole, Sinclair, Sidney Lanier, Walter F. George Reservoir, or West Point, must have the marine toilet equipped with a holding tank that is built so that it can only be emptied by being pumped out. The "Y" valve must be removed to prevent discharge.
- If built before January 1, 1978, the boat may be equipped with a fully operable U.S. Coast Guard-certified Marine Sanitation Device (MSD) if the MSD is part of the boat's original equipment. Note: Sewer from the wastewater holding system or MSD must conform to current guidelines for disposal.

You must maintain a record, going back at least one year, of the name and location of the pump-out facilities you use to empty your holding system and the dates of such use.

SL 8. Muffling Devices

The exhaust of every internal combustion engine used on any boat must be muffled or baffled and water injected (except those engines that exhaust through the lower unit or out drive when the vessel is on plane) so as to decrease noise.

Enforcement officials are authorized to submit boats to noise level tests and cite boat operators whose boats are not in compliance.

SL 9. Boating Accidents

You must stop and render whatever assistance is necessary to any person involved in a boating incident unless it would endanger your own boat or passengers. You cannot be held liable for any civil damages for any assistance rendered in good faith

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and in a prudent manner.

Boat operators involved in an incident must report it by the quickest means possible if there is:

- Death or the disappearance of a person from a boat under circumstances that indicate death or injury
- Injury requiring first aid or medical attention
- Property damage exceeding \$500 to all boats, docks, etc. involved in the incident.

In the case of a reportable incident, the operator or owner must file an incident report form supplied by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

Most reports of incidents must be made within 5 days of the incident. However, you must report an incident within 48 hours if a:

- Person dies within 24 hours as a result of the incident
- Person is disabled for more than 24 hours
- Person requires medical treatment for injuries
- Person disappears from a boat or PWC.

You must give your name, address and Certificate of Boat Registration information in writing to any injured person and to the owner of any damaged property if you are involved in a boating incident.

SL 10. Vessel Speed Restrictions

Failure to Regulate Speed is a violation that occurs when operating a boat or PWC at speeds that may cause danger, injury, damage, or unnecessary inconvenience either directly or indirectly, by the effect of the boat's wake.

It is illegal to:

- Fail to regulate your speed within 100 feet of swimming areas, docks, moored boats and boats engaged in fishing
- Operate a boat or PWC faster than is reasonable and prudent under the conditions (weather, boat traffic).

SL 11. Mooring to Markers or Buoys

It is illegal to moor or attach a boat to a buoy, beacon, light, or any other navigational aid placed on public waters by proper authorities. In addition, it is illegal to move, displace, tamper with, damage, or destroy any navigational aids.

SL 12. Reckless and Careless Operation

Reckless Operation of a boat or PWC is the disregard for the safety of persons or property.

Examples:

- Water skiing or dropping water skiers close to swimmers, launching ramps or other boaters
- Jumping the wake of another boat within 100 feet of that boat or buzzing other boats
- Causing damage from the wake of your boat.

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SL 13. Interference with Navigation

It is illegal to:

- Anchor a boat in the traveled portion of a river or channel that will prevent or interfere with other passing boats.
- Obstruct a pier, wharf, boat ramp or access to any facility.

SL 14. Boating Under the Influence

The Georgia Boat Safety Act prohibits anyone from boating under the influence (BUI) -- that is, operating any boat, sailboat, personal watercraft, water skis, sailboard or similar device while intoxicated.

It is also unlawful for the owner of a boat or PWC to allow anyone else to operate their boat or PWC while that person is under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Georgia boating law states:

- It is illegal for those under the age of 21 years to operate a boat or PWC if their blood alcohol level is 0.02 or more.
- Those 21 years of age or older are considered to be under the influence, and may not operate a boat or PWC, if their blood alcohol level is 0.08 or more or if drugs are detected.

The Georgia Boat Safety Act sets these penalties:

- Those arrested for boating under the influence may lose their privilege to operate a vessel until they successfully complete a DUI Alcohol or Drug Use Risk Reduction Program approved by the Georgia Department of Human Resources.
- They will also be charged with a misdemeanor punishable by fines up to \$1,000 and/or prison time up to one year.

By operating a boat or PWC on Georgia waters, you have consented to be tested for alcohol or drugs if requested by a law enforcement official. If you refuse to be tested, you will lose your privilege to operate a boat or PWC for up to one year and your refusal may be offered into evidence against you at a trial.

A person found operating a boat or PWC under the influence while a child under the age of 14 years is onboard, is also guilty of the separate charge of child endangerment.

SL 15. Mandatory Violator Education

Georgia has no mandatory violator education regulations at this time.

SL 16. PWC Regulations

Although PWCs are considered to be a Class A boat, they are engineered differently than most boats. Since they are a jet boat, the water being forced out through the steerable nozzle controls the direction of the boat. If you release the throttle or shut-off the ignition, you will lose all steering control. When operating a PWC, boaters should avoid being stranded by carrying a full fuel reserve tank. All PWC operators and passengers must wear a USCG-approved PFD.

Additional Regulations:

- Each person riding on a PWC must wear a USCG Approved Type I, II, III or V personal flotation device, which is properly fitted and fastened.
- PWCs must be equipped with fully operational self-circling device or a lanyard type engine cut-off switch. If a cut-off switch is used, the lanyard must be

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- attached to the operator's person, clothing or PFD.
- PWCs may not be operated between sunset and sunrise.
- A PWC, operating at more than idle speed, may not run around, ride or jump the wake of, or be within 100 feet of another moving boat or PWC unless it is overtaking the other boat in compliance with the rules for encountering other boats. When a PWC is over-taking another boat, it must not change course to ride or jump the wake of the boat being overtaken.
- A PWC must be operated at idle speed if within 100 feet of a vessel not underway or adrift, dock or pier, bridge, person in the water, shoreline adjacent to a residence, public park or beach, swimming area, marina, restaurant or other public use area.
- It is unlawful for an owner of a PWC to allow anyone else to operate his or her PWC in such a way that it violates the Georgia Boat Safety Act.

SL 17. Water Ski Regulations

It is illegal for boats or PWCs to tow skiers, ski boards, or any device of this type between sunset and sunrise.

It is illegal for the operator of the towing vessel or person(s) being towed to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

A boat or PWC must not tow persons on water skis or similar devices within 100 feet of a vessel not underway or adrift, dock or pier, bridge, person in the water, shoreline adjacent to a residence, public park or beach, swim area, marina, restaurant or other public use area.

The person being towed must wear a ski-belt, ski jacket or Type I, Type II or Type III personal flotation device.

Every boat towing a person(s) on water skis, or a similar device must have:

- A person, in addition to the boat operator, capable of observing the towed person(s) at all times, or...
- A wide-angle rearview mirror mounted such that the operator can observe the towed person(s) at all times.

Every PWC towing a person(s) on water skis, or similar device must be rated by the manufacturer to carry three or more persons and must have onboard a person, in addition to the PWC operator, capable of observing the towed person(s) at all times. A wide-angle mirror may not be used in place of an observer on a PWC.

SL 18. Divers-down Flag

Scuba divers or snorkelers should display a "Diver Down" flag that marks the diving area. Vessels must remain at least 100 feet away from the person in the water.

SL 19. Liveries (Rental Agencies)

'Boat livery' means a business, which holds a vessel for renting, leasing, or chartering.

Neither the owner of a boat livery nor any agent or employee of the boat livery owner may permit any vessel owned by the boat livery to depart from the premises of the boat livery unless it is properly registered, numbered, and titled.

In the State of Georgia, it is unlawful to rent a personal watercraft to anyone under the age of 16.

SL 20. Other State Boating Laws

SL 21. Environmental Awareness

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Marine Events

- Permits for events held on state controlled waters are required and are granted through the Georgia Department of Natural Resources by applying at least 30 days in advance of the event. If the event is likely to attract 10,000 or more persons, the request must be made 90 days in advance.
- Events held on federally controlled waters are granted through the U. S. Coast Guard by applying at least 30 days in advance.

Hypothermia

Dress in several layers of clothing under your PFD or wear a wetsuit or dry suit.

Learn to recognize the symptoms of hypothermia. Symptoms begin with shivering and bluish lips and nails, and progress to a coma and, ultimately, death.

To reduce the effects of hypothermia:

- Get as much of your body out of the water as possible.
- Don't take your clothes off unless necessary. Remember, clothes trap heat and can help you float.
- Don't thrash or move about. Excess motion consumes energy and increases loss of body heat.
- Always wear a PFD. It helps you to float without excessive movement and insulates your body.
- Draw your knees to your chest and your arms to your sides protecting the major cause of heat loss.
- If others are in the water with you, huddle together with your arms around their shoulders.

Fishing and Boating

Georgia is an angler's paradise, and our parks offer excellent fishing and boating opportunities. Most have boat ramps and docks, and some parks feature marinas. Water skiing, sailing and personal watercraft are permitted at parks on larger lakes; however, a few parks on smaller lakes have restrictions on private boats and horsepower limitations. Visitors should call ahead before making plans. Fishing in park lakes, rivers and streams is free, but a valid Georgia resident/non-resident fishing license is required for anglers 16 or older. Trout stamps are required when fishing in streams. Visit www.gofishgeorgia.com for license and regulation information.

For more information on Georgia boating law refer to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources at:

<http://georgiawildlife.dnr.state.ga.us/content/displaynavigation.asp?TopCategory=4>.

Also refer to the Georgia Code Title 52 - Waters of the State, Ports, and Watercraft, the Georgia Boat Safety Act, Sections 52-7-1 to 52-7-77 at <http://www.lexis-nexis.com/hottopics/gacode/Default.asp>.