

STATE OF IOWA

State-Specific Boating Safety Requirements

SL 1. Law Enforcement Authority

Iowa boating regulations are mainly enforced by Iowa Department of Natural Resources enforcement officers. Specifically, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources is charged with the duty of observing, administering, and enforcing the Water Navigation Regulations. The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) also has enforcement authority on federally controlled waters. An enforcement officer has the authority to stop and inspect a vessel being launched, operated, or moored on the waters of Iowa to determine whether the vessel is properly registered, numbered and equipped.

SL 2. Age Restrictions

Youth under 12 years of age may operate a Personal Watercraft (PWC) only if he or she is accompanied onboard by a responsible person of at least 18 years old. Those 12 years of age or older, but younger than 18 years old, may operate a PWC only if he or she has successfully completed a boating safety course approved by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

SL 3. Boater Safety Education Requirements

For persons ages 12 to 17 to be the sole operator of a PWC, he or she must successfully complete a boating safety course approved by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. Certified boaters must carry their boater education certificate onboard while the vessel is in operation and make it available to enforcement officers upon request.

SL 4. Vessel Registration

You must have an Iowa Registration Certificate and registration decals to legally operate a vessel on Iowa's public waters. Exemptions include:

- Inflatable vessels that are 7 feet or less in length and have no motor or sail.
- Canoes and kayaks that are 13 feet or less in length and have no engine or sail.
- Vessels properly registered in another state and using Iowa waters for 60 or fewer days within one calendar year.

The Registration Certificate and registration decals are obtained by presenting the proper application form and fee to the County Recorder in the county of residence of the owner or the county where the vessel is principally used. *The Registration Certificate (pocket-sized registration card) must be onboard and available for inspection by an enforcement officer whenever the vessel is operated.*

SL 5. Maximum Loading and Horsepower

The State of Iowa 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.

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

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 U.S. Coast Guard (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 addition, overloaded boats will be more difficult to control. In many states, there are fines and penalties for exceeding capacity recommendations, including carrying more than the maximum number of people.

For vessels that are not equipped with a capacity plate, the following formula can be used to calculate the number of persons (averaging 150 lbs each) the vessel can carry safely in good weather:

$$\text{Number of people} = \text{vessel length (feet)} \times \text{vessel width (feet)} \div 15$$

SL 6. Equipment and Lighting Requirements

When boating in the State of Iowa, you are required to observe the federal boating safety laws regarding mandatory safety 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 Iowa 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), 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.

In addition to federal requirements regarding safety equipment, Iowa boating regulations have additional stipulations regarding fire extinguishers, visual distress signals, sound producing devices and navigational lights. These requirements are as follows:

Fire Extinguishers - Vessels on Iowa waters must have a Type B fire extinguisher(s) onboard if the vessel is propelled by an outboard motor of greater than 10 horsepower.

Sound Producing Devices - When operating a vessel on state waters and the vessel is under 26 feet long (including a PWC), you must have onboard a whistle or other sound device. If the vessel is longer than 26 feet but less than 40 feet you must have onboard a whistle, horn or other sound device. When operating on federally controlled waters and the vessel is under 39.4 feet long (including a PWC), it must be equipped with a whistle or horn. If the vessel is longer than 39.4 feet, you must have onboard a whistle or horn and a bell.

Visual Distress Signals (VDSs) - While VDSs are not required on Iowa waters, it is *strongly recommended* that you have VDSs on your vessel. All vessels used on federally controlled waters must be equipped with USCG-approved VDSs. Boats must be equipped with night signals when operating between sundown and sunup.

Navigation Lights - All vessels not powered by motor or sail and not at anchor must exhibit a white light to show 360 degrees around the horizon between the hours of sundown and sunup when operated on natural lakes, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers impoundments, border rivers, and impoundments on inland rivers. When operated on bodies of water other than those listed in this rule, all vessels not powered by motor or sail and not at anchor must be equipped with a hand-held light to be used when necessary between the hours of sundown and sunup. All vessels while at anchor must display where it can best be seen between the hours of sundown and sunup: if in the fore part, an all-round white light or one ball; and at or near the stern, and at a lower level than the light prescribed above, an all-round white light. **A**

vessel of less than 50 meters in length may display an all-round white light where it can best be seen instead of the lights prescribed above.

SL 7. Marine Sanitation Devices

Federal regulations for waste, oil and trash disposal apply also to Iowa waters. It is unlawful to discharge waste, oil or trash into Iowa waters. Vessels with installed toilet facilities must have an operable marine sanitation device (MSD).

SL 8. Muffling Devices

To reduce noise, exhaust of internal combustion engines must be equipped with factory-installed mufflers, exhaust water manifolds or other effective muffling system. Motorboats may not exceed a total motorboat noise of 86 decibels as measured on the "A" scale at a distance of 50 feet or greater.

All muffling devices used on motorboats must be in good working order and in constant operation to prevent excessive or unusual noise. Excessive noise can prevent a vessel operator from hearing signals and voices. The use of cutouts is prohibited, except for vessels competing in an authorized marine event.

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 "boating accident" includes, but is not limited to, capsizing, collision, foundering, flooding, fire, explosion and the disappearance of a vessel other than by theft. Any accident involving death, disappearance or personal injury, or damage greater than \$500 must be verbally reported to the closest enforcement agency immediately. An official written report should be submitted to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources immediately in the case of loss of life or disappearance. All other reportable accidents must be filed within five days.

SL 10. Vessel Speed Restrictions

Speed and distance regulations apply to Iowa waters under the jurisdiction of the Department of Natural Resources. Although the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers are federal rivers of the U.S., they are also under the jurisdiction of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and all restrictions apply to these waters as well. According to Iowa law, motors 10 horsepower or less are permitted on all county and state-owned, man-made lakes over 100 acres in size. However, speed and horsepower ratings are limited by law for certain conditions and areas. Contact the Department of Natural Resources for a listing. General speed restrictions applicable to all navigable bodies of water in Iowa are as follows:

- You are responsible for your wake. Do not exceed 5 mph within 100 feet of any boat going 5 mph or less.
- When two boats are operating at over 5 mph they should stay at least 50 feet apart.
- You should not exceed 10 mph unless vision is unobstructed more than 200 feet ahead.
- On inland lakes and federal impoundments: Do not exceed 10 mph within 300 feet of shore (except in specially zoned areas).

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.

SL 12. Reckless and Careless Operation

No vessel shall be operated within Iowa in a reckless or negligent manner. Examples of reckless or careless operation include:

- Excessive speed in regulated or congested areas.
- Operating in a manner that may cause an accident.
- Operating in a swimming area with bathers present.
- Bow riding or riding on the gunwale or transom where no seating is provided.
- Operation of a PWC in a manner that endangers life or property.

In the State of Iowa, it is unlawful to chase or harass animals while operating a PWC or motorboat.

SL 13. Interference with Navigation

It is unlawful to:

- Anchor a vessel under a bridge, in a lock chamber, or near the entrance of a lock, or 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 Iowa in a way that may endanger the operation of watercraft or conflict with the marking system prescribed by the State of Iowa.
- 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

Iowa law prohibits anyone from boating while intoxicated (BWI). This includes the operation of any vessel or manipulation of any water skis, surfboard or similar device while under the influence of an alcoholic beverage, marijuana, a narcotic, hypnotic or other drug, or any combination of these substances. Iowa law states that a person is considered to be boating while intoxicated (BWI) if he or she:

- Is under the influence of an alcoholic beverage or other drug or a combination of such substances; or
- Has a blood, breath, or urine alcohol concentration of 0.10% or more; or
- Has any amount of drug or other controlled substance present in his or her person, as measured in his or her blood or urine.

Iowa law establishes the following penalties for BWI convictions:

- Upon a first conviction, the violator may be fined \$1,000, jailed for at least 48 hours, and prohibited from operating for one year.
- Upon a second conviction, the violator may be fined up to \$5,000, jailed for at least 7 days, and prohibited from operating for two years.
- Upon third and subsequent convictions, the violator may be fined up to \$7,500, jailed up to one year, and prohibited from operating for six years.
- Those convicted of BWI who caused the death or injury of someone will receive severe penalties in addition to those above.
- Anyone convicted of BWI in the State of Iowa will be assigned to substance abuse evaluation and/or treatment and be required to take a course discussing the hazards of drinking and driving.

By operating a vessel on Iowa waters, you have given "implied" consent to alcohol testing. Refusal to be tested can result in a fine up to \$500 and loss of operating privileges up to one year for a first offense.

SL 15. Mandatory Violator Education

Iowa does not currently have regulations requiring mandatory boating safety education for violators of boating laws. However, as noted in the preceding section, BWI violators must have undergo substance abuse evaluation and treatment, together with a course for drinking drivers.

SL 16. PWC Regulations

In the State of Iowa, a Personal Watercraft is defined as a vessel, less than 16 feet in length, which is propelled by a water jet pump or similar machinery as its primary source of motor propulsion and is designed to be operated by a person sitting, standing, or kneeling on the vessel rather than being operated by a person sitting, standing, or kneeling inside the vessel. In Iowa, a PWC is considered a motorboat and must abide by the same rules as any other motorized vessel. The operator of a PWC should operate in a reasonable and prudent manner. This includes being aware of other boats in the operating area, awareness of environmental concerns, and respecting the rights of shoreline property owners. PWC operators should not follow other boats closely and should not jump the wake of other boats. Each person on a PWC must wear a Type I, II, III, or V USCG-approved PFD. Inflatable PFDs are not approved for use on PWCs. It is unlawful to operate a personal watercraft at any time between sundown and sunup.

SL 17. Water Ski Regulations

To operate a vessel for the purpose of towing another person on water skis, aquaplane, surfboard or similar device, a responsible observer must be aboard the vessel in addition to the operator. The observer must keep the person being towed in sight at all times. Persons may be towed behind vessels only between the hours of sunrise and one-half hour after sunset. The towboat operator and skier are responsible for ensuring that they operate in a manner that does not threaten or harm or strike another person or vessel. In addition, each person engaged in water skiing or aquaplaning must wear a USCG-approved Type I, II or III PFD. Inflatable PFDs are not approved for persons being towed behind the vessel.

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.

All divers shall display a free-flying, white diagonal stripe on a red background Divers-Down flag or the Internationally recognized Alpha flag. Iowa law requires boaters to stay at least 50 feet away from a displayed Divers-Down flag. When boating near a displayed flag, you should also be aware of air bubbles breaking the surface, as it is possible for divers to stray from the safe area of the flag.

SL 19. Liveries (Rental Agencies)

The owner of a boat livery must keep (for a 6-month period) a record of the name and address of the person(s) hiring any vessel that is designed or permitted by the owner to be operated for hire, the identification number thereof, the departure date and time and the expected time of return. The owner of a boat livery must not permit any of the owner's vessels, operated for hire, to depart from the owner's premises unless it has been provided, either by the owner or renter, with the required equipment.

SL 20. Other State-Specific Regulations Marine Event Permits

To hold a marine event such as a regatta, motorboat or other boat race, marine parade, tournament or exhibition on Iowa State waters, you must obtain a permit prior to the event by applying for authorization from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources at least 30 days in advance of the event. If the event is being held on federally controlled waters, a permit from the U.S. Coast Guard is required.

SL 21. Environmental Awareness

Aquatic Nuisance Species

Aquatic nuisance species like zebra mussels have been introduced into Iowa waters, this 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.

Zebra mussels arrived in the Midwest several years ago. Densities range from 1 per every square meter at Lock and Dam 1 in St. Paul, Minnesota, to 11,432 per square meter at Lock and Dam 13 just north of Davenport, Iowa. Most of the Locks and Dams in between had densities greater than 1000/m², for that reason it is very important that boaters help to prevent the spread of this mussels. To prevent spreading aquatic nuisance species:

- Inspect your vessel and trailer, removing any plants and animals you see before leaving the waterbody.
- Drain your engine, 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 Iowa boating law refer to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources at <http://www.iowadnr.com>. See also Iowa Code Title XI – Natural Resources, Chapter 462A – Water Navigation Regulations, Sections 462A.1 – 462A.85 at <http://www.legis.state.ia.us/IACODE/2003/462A/>.