

STATE OF KENTUCKY
State-Specific Boating Safety Requirements

1. Law Enforcement Authority

The Division of Law Enforcement of the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources is the sole agency responsible for enforcing the boating laws and regulations applicable to the waters of Kentucky. Enforcement personnel have the authority to stop and board vessels to check for compliance with state and federal laws. The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) also has enforcement authority on all federally controlled waters.

2. Age Restrictions

A person must be 12 years of age or older to operate a motorboat of 10 horsepower or over, including personal watercraft (PWC), on Kentucky public waters. A person 12 - 17 years old may not operate a motorboat on public waters unless that person carries a boating education certificate or is accompanied by a person 18 years or older or a person in possession of a NASBLA-approved boating education certification.

3. Boater Safety Education Requirements

To operate a personal watercraft or motorboat over 10 horsepower, children 12 through 17 years of age must possess a NASBLA-approved Safe Boating Certification who unless accompanied by an adult (18 years or older) or a person with a safe boating certificate.

4. Vessel Registration

All mechanically powered vessels used primarily in Kentucky must be registered. Owners may register in the county of their residence or the county of principal use at the county clerk's office. Boat registrations expire April 30 each year. Boats with a current registration in other states may be used for up to 60 consecutive days in Kentucky without registering in this state. All boats operated in Kentucky must have the registration certificate on board. Boats that are rented from a marina or boat livery must have a lease agreement on board.

Boats are assigned a registration number and decals, which must be displayed correctly. The number assigned, and no other, must be displayed on the bow, or forward half, of each side of the vessel, read from left to right, and in a position to be distinctly visible. The letters and numbers must be of a plain block design, at least 3 inches in height, and of a color that will provide maximum contrast to the background (light numbers on a dark hull or vice versa). There must be a letter-sized space between letter and number groups:

CORRECT: KY 1234 AA

INCORRECT: KY1234AA

Registration decals are to be placed within 6 inches behind (aft) and in line with the registration number. Upon renewal every year, old registration decals are to be removed and the current ones applied.

5. Maximum Loading and Horsepower

The State of Kentucky 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:

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

6. Equipment and Lighting Requirements

Personal Flotation Devices

The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources strongly recommends that USCG-approved PFDs be worn while boating, especially by children and non-swimmers. Federal as well as state law requires a Type I, II, or III PFD be carried on all boats for each person onboard a vessel. Boats over 16 feet, except canoes and kayaks, must also carry one Type IV (throwable) PFD. Operators and passengers of personal watercraft must wear a PFD at all times. Persons under 12 years old must wear a USCG-approved PFD while a boat is under way unless they are in an enclosed cabin.

Fire Extinguishers

Kentucky law requires that all boats equipped with a petroleum product (gasoline, kerosene, propane, etc.) consuming device (engines, lanterns, stoves, etc.) shall have a hand portable fire extinguisher in serviceable condition and located for immediate use. Depending on the length of the vessel, more than one fire extinguisher may be required by law. The best fire protection is well-maintained equipment and proper safety habits.

Backfire Flame Arresters

To safeguard against backfire from internal combustion engines, all motorboats with enclosed engines and engines originally equipped with a flame arrester (except outboards and diesels) must have an approved carburetor backfire flame arrester system on each carburetor.

Ventilation

Most fires on a boat are due to ignition of fuel vapors. Since gasoline is heavier than air, it can collect in the bilge or engine compartment and can be ignited by a mere spark. To prevent fires or explosions caused by fuel vapors Kentucky law requires boats to have adequate ventilation of areas where flammable vapors can accumulate.

Most boats are equipped by the boat manufacturer with adequate ventilation systems. These systems are usually a combination of both active and passive systems. Active systems use electrical blowers to exhaust flammable vapors from the bilge and other areas. Passive systems are ducts and cowls that ventilate areas when the boat is moving. Almost all inboards will have an electrical blower installed in the engine compartment. Operators should run the blower for several minutes before starting the engine. If the blower is inoperable, it should be repaired or replaced immediately. Many boat fires take place after refueling, so care should be taken to avoid the spillage of fuel in the vessel.

Navigation Lights

All vessels must display proper navigation lights when underway between sunset and sunrise as described by the federal lighting requirements established by the U.S. Coast Guard. To review federal lighting requirements refer to Chapter 2 of this course.

Signaling Devices

Kentucky law requires that all boats 16 feet in length or longer must have a hand-, mouth- or power-operated signaling device capable of producing a blast for two seconds or more and audible for one-half mile for class one vessels, one mile for class two vessels, and one and one-half miles for class three vessels. This does not exempt vessels from carrying any other signaling device as may be required by federal law when operating on navigable waters of this state.

Maneuvering and Warning Signals

- One Long Blast: Warning signal (coming out of slip)
- One Short Blast: Pass on my port side (left)
- Two Short Blasts: Pass on my starboard (right)
- Three Short Blasts: Engines in reverse
- Five or More Blasts: Danger signal

Recommended Items

In addition to the safety equipment required by law, boaters should strongly consider carrying the following list of items: first aid kit, boat paddle, radio (Marine Band or CB) or cell phone, tow line, owner's manual, spare parts and tools, bailing device or bilge pump, jumper cables, emergency food, drinking water, and a blanket.

These items will assist in an emergency and make for a safer and more pleasant cruise. . Both the type of boat and the body of water on which you will be boating will dictate how much extra equipment is needed. By anticipating problems, boaters will be prepared before any difficulties occur.

7. Marine Sanitation Devices (MSDs)

Kentucky law prohibits discharge of any sewage, treated or untreated, into the state's freshwaters. Motorboats with marine toilets are not allowed on public waters unless the toilet is equipped with a Type I, II, or III marine sanitation device (MSD.) Treated sewage may be discharged from a marine toilet into legal "discharge" waters including Barkley and Kentucky lakes, Lake Cumberland, Dale Hollow Lake and any of the major river systems. Type I and II MSDs must be sealed or locked while the vessel is on "no discharge" waters.

8. Muffling Devices

To reduce noise, motorboat engines must be equipped with factory-installed mufflers, exhaust water manifolds or other effective muffling system. However, some high-performance boats may have been modified by the owners and may not be in compliance with the law.

9. Boating Accidents

If a boat is involved in an accident, the operator must give necessary assistance (i.e., "Rendering Aid") to the other vessel and passengers, as long as it will not personally endanger the operator, his or her passengers, or the vessel.

A Boating Accident Report must be submitted to the Law Enforcement Division. The following boating accidents must be reported within 48 hours:

- If it involves the death, disappearance, or serious injury of a person or if it incapacitates a person for 24 hours or more.

All accidents involving property damage greater than \$500 (to one vessel or a combination of both vessels) must be reported within 5 days.

Emergency Preparedness

Before operating a vessel, all boaters should be both trained and prepared to handle emergency situations. In addition to standard safety equipment required to be carried on all boats, vessels should also be equipped with a first aid kit. This kit should be able to provide treatment for burns, insect bites, cuts and abrasions. Boaters should also be trained to render first aid if necessary. By taking a first aid course, boaters can learn to treat victims with minor injuries as well as sprains, broken bones and shock. It is also a good idea for boaters to learn how to correctly perform Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) in case they encounter victims of near drowning, heart attack or trauma from boating accidents. In many cases, emergency medical help is further away on the water than on land. Interested persons should contact their local chapter of the American Red Cross for information on first aid and CPR training.

10. Vessel Speed Restrictions

All boat operators must observe posted speed restrictions including Idle-Speed or No-Wake Zones. Idle or No-Wake speed is defined as the slowest possible speed necessary to maintain steerage. In an area that does not have any speed restrictions, a vessel should be operated at a speed that will allow the operator to stop within the clear, visible distance ahead.

11. Mooring to Markers or Buoys

It is unlawful to moor or attach a vessel to a beacon, light, 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. Boaters are permitted to tie off to buoys (i.e., mooring buoys) that have been placed on the waters for that specific purpose.

12. Reckless and Careless Operation

Reckless operation of a vessel, water skis or similar device is a serious offense. Reckless operation of a vessel or the reckless use of water skis, a surfboard or similar device is defined as the failure to exercise care needed to prevent the endangerment of life, limb, or property of any person. Examples of unlawful reckless operation are:

- Boating in restricted areas without regard for other boaters or persons, posted speeds and wake restrictions, diver-down flags, etc.
- Boating while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Operating a vessel in swimming areas.
- Riding on seatbacks, gunwales, transoms or pedestal seats while operating above idle speed.
- Excessive speed in crowded areas, dangerous areas or during periods of limited visibility.
- Operating an overloaded vessel.
- Towing a skier in a crowded area where a fallen skier may be hit by other vessels, or towing in areas where the skier may hit an obstacle.
- Using a PWC to jump the immediate wake of another boat.

Persons must not operate a motorboat or personal watercraft within 50 feet of a commercial vessel and its tow operating on a Kentucky waterway, except if the operator of the commercial vessel has given consent. Even in areas not marked as idle speed, excessive wake can still be dangerous.

13. Interference with Navigation

It is unlawful to:

- Anchor a vessel in the traveled portion of a river or channel 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 Kentucky in a way that may endanger the operation of watercraft or conflict with the marking system prescribed by the State of Kentucky.

14. Boating Under the Influence

In Kentucky, it is unlawful for anyone to operate a boat while intoxicated; i.e., operating a vessel while intoxicated due to alcohol or any combination of alcohol, controlled substance or drugs. It is also illegal to drink alcoholic beverages in public places, which includes the waterways of Kentucky.

By operating a boat or PWC on Kentucky waters, operators have consented to be tested for alcohol or drugs if requested by law enforcement personnel. If an operator refuses to be tested, he or she will be subject to arrest and punishment according to penalties.

The blood alcohol concentration limit in the State of Kentucky is 0.08 percent. Anyone convicted of boating under the influence or while intoxicated will be subject to fines and possible jail time.

15. Mandatory Violator Education

Kentucky does not currently have any regulation requiring boating safety education for boating law violators.

16. PWC Regulations

Personal watercraft (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 considered powered vessels and must abide by the same rules and regulations as any other boat. PWCs must be registered, carry PFDs and be operated at a speed safe enough for the operator to avoid a collision or to stop in time to avoid an accident. In addition to being governed by the same laws that apply to all boats, the following laws apply to PWCs:

- PWCs can only be operated between sunrise and sunset.
- PWCs that are not equipped with a self-circling capability must have a lanyard-type engine kill switch attached to the operator when the craft is underway.
- Operators and passengers must wear a USCG-approved personal flotation device (PFD.)

17. Water Ski Regulations

Persons being towed behind a vessel on any device such as water-skis, kneeboards, inner tubes, or other flotation device must wear a Type I, II, or III PFD. Persons may be towed only between the hours of sunrise and sunset. Boats (including PWCs) towing skiers must have, in addition to the operator of the boat, an observer 12 years of age or older or a wide angle rearview mirror mounted so that the operator can view the skier but still give full attention to traffic ahead. There must be adequate seating for all riders. Both the operator and skier should be alert to the areas of a lake or river marked as "no ski" zones. Persons shall not ski within 100 feet of a commercial boat dock, a moorage harbor, or a swimming area; or within 2,000 feet of a lock or dam. Additionally, it is illegal to manipulate skis, surfboards, etc. while intoxicated or under the influence of any other substance that impairs one's operating ability. Since many smaller state and private lakes have additional regulations regarding water skiing, check with the appropriate local agency before water skiing in these areas.

Boats towing kites and similar airborne devices must:

- Have, in addition to the operator, an observer 12 years or older (mirror will not suffice),
- Stay 500 feet from commercial docks and ramps,
- Limit the tow rope to 150 feet or less,
- Have no more than two persons being towed.

18. Divers-down Flag

It is unlawful to skin or scuba dive in all lakes owned by the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, except during emergencies and during salvage operations when the diver has written permission from the regional director or local wildlife and boating law enforcement officer assigned to the specific waterbody in which the diving will take place.

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, skin divers and snorkelers must mark their diving area by means of a diver's down flag. Vessel operators must keep a distance of at least 100-foot radius between the flag and their boats when on Kentucky waters.

19. Liveries (Rental Agencies)

Although Kentucky does not have regulations regarding liveries, all liveries should provide renters with information on rules, laws, and basic navigation and boating safety. Boats that are rented from a marina or boat livery must have a lease agreement on board.

20. Other State-Specific Regulations

Drinking in Public and Public Intoxication

Kentucky specifically prohibits the drinking of alcoholic beverages in public places (excluding establishments licensed to sell such beverages), which includes the state's waterways. Persons manifestly under the influence of alcoholic beverages in a public place to the extent that they may unreasonably annoy or endanger themselves or others shall be subject to arrest.

Locks and Dams

Boaters in Kentucky may encounter both lock and dam systems. Generally, these will be on the Green, Ohio and Kentucky Rivers (for the first four locks upstream to Frankfort, KY), but a few impoundments also have a lock and dam. Locks are a relatively simple method of raising or lowering boats from one water level to another. If lockage is desired, boaters should signal the lock operator by using the pull chain on each end of the lock or calling on marine channel 13. If the lock is not immediately available, boaters should position their vessels a safe distance from the approach channel to avoid personal injury or damage to their boat from wakes caused by commercial tows entering or leaving the locks. A vessel must not be moored in the lock approach channels.

Dams associated with locks can be very dangerous. Boaters should be alert for these structures. Dams are either conventional or "low head" type. Conventional dams are easily recognizable with their spillways and power installations. Low head dams pose an even greater danger due to the fact that they are not as recognizable, especially when water is flowing over them. Although they are usually marked with "keep out" buoys or "danger" signs above and below, it is easy to underestimate the danger posed by these structures. The flow of water spilling over the top of the dam creates a "boil" on the lower side that can easily trap boaters. Boaters risk almost certain death if caught in this turbulence. When boating near any type of dam, be sure to keep a safe distance between your boat and the dam.

21. Environmental Awareness

Hypothermia

Hypothermia is caused by a combination of cold, moisture, wind and exhaustion. Prevention is the best cure. Monitor weather reports when you plan to be in the outdoors. Dress in layers and always have foul-weather gear handy. Symptoms of hypothermia include uncontrollable

shivering, slurred speech, stumbling, blue skin, decreased heart and breathing rate, weak pulse, and unconsciousness. All hypothermia symptoms demand immediate attention. A victim of hypothermia should be dressed in dry clothing and moved indoor as soon as possible. For victims showing mild symptoms, move them near a fire or other heat source or put them in a warm sleeping bag. For victims with advanced symptoms of hypothermia, seek immediate medical attention. Never give alcohol to a hypothermia victim.

Aquatic Nuisance Species

Aquatic nuisance species are non-native plant and animals species, sometimes referred to as exotic species that have been introduced to local waterways, endangering native species. Examples of harmful species include gizzard shad and alewives. These fish are present in several water bodies mainly as a result of sport anglers who have both intentionally and unintentionally stocked fish in Kentucky's public waters. Gizzard shad interfere with the ability of a lake to support a quality bluegill population. Alewives are a non-native fish that was introduced into Lake Cumberland. The illegal introduction of these fish into Kentucky's public waters has raised concern for the sustainability of local fish species. Although the total impact of these fish is not known, they are known to eat juvenile fish, including sport fishes. To protect local fish stocks, Kentucky law states that no live fish, live minnow, or live bait organisms not native or established in Kentucky shall be bought, sold, possessed, imported, or in any way used or released into Kentucky waters.

There are also many other harmful non-native aquatic species that have invaded the country, particularly in the Great Lake states. These include Eurasian watermilfoil, round goby, ruffe, spring water flea, and zebra mussels. Zebra mussels are present in Kentucky and have nuisance levels in the Ohio River. They attach themselves to any solid submerged surface in a cluster, reproduce rapidly and pose a serious threat to native freshwater mussels. These mussels have an elongated pointed shell less than two inches long with a zebra-like pattern of stripes. Zebra mussels can live 8-10 days out of water and can be transported to another water body while attached to a boat.

To help stop the spread of non-native species:

- CLEAN your boat and trailer before launching into or leaving any water body.
- REMOVE all plants and animals.
- DRAIN all water from bilges and livewells.
- DISPOSE of unwanted live bait on shore – DO NOT STOCK THE LAKE!
- RINSE your boat, trailer, and equipment with high-pressure hot water.
- DRY everything for at least 5 days.

Additional Information

For more information on Kentucky boating law refer to the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Services at <http://fw.ky.gov/Navigation.asp?cid=102>; 301 Kentucky Administrative Regulations (KAR) Chapter 6 – Water Patrol (under [Title 301 Tourism Development Cabinet Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources](#)) at <http://www.lrc.state.ky.us/kar/TITLE301.HTM>; and Kentucky Revised Statutes (KRS), Title XIX – Public Safety and Morals, Chapter 235 – Boats and Boating at <http://www.lrc.state.ky.us/KRS/235-00/CHAPTER.HTM>.