

State-Specific Boating Safety Requirements

Louisiana State Laws

1. Law Enforcement Authority

In Louisiana, boating laws are enforced by agents of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), and authorized peace officers of the state. These officers have the right to stop and board vessels to check for compliance with federal and state laws. The USCG has enforcement authority on federally controlled waters.

2. Age Restrictions

Any person born after January 1, 1988 who holds a boating safety education certificate may operate a vessel powered by 10 HP or more on the waters of the State of Louisiana. The boating safety class must be approved by the National Association of Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA), and the certificate of completion must accompany the operator when operating the vessel. A motorboat may be operated if any person on board or participating in any boating activity from the motorboat is over the age of 18 and, if required to have completed a boating safety course under the provisions above, has completed the required boating safety course.

It is unlawful for anyone under the age of 13 to operate a personal watercraft (PWC). It is also unlawful for a person who owns or has charge of a PWC to knowingly permit a person under the age of 13 years to operate the PWC. It is unlawful for a rental company (livery) to rent a personal watercraft to anyone under 13 years of age.

3. Boater Safety Education Requirements

Anyone born after January 1, 1988 must complete a NASBLA-approved boating safety education course to operate a vessel powered by a motor of 10 or more horsepower.

4. Vessel Registration

Registering Your Vessel

To operate a vessel legally on public waters in Louisiana, a person must have a Louisiana Certificate of Number and validation decals. Exceptions include:

- A sailboat 12 feet or less in length
- A sailboard
- Vessels documented with the USCG
- Vessels with valid registration in another state or country operated on Louisiana waters for 90 or fewer consecutive days.

The Certificate of Number (pocket-sized registration card) must be onboard when the vessel is in operation and available for inspection by an enforcement officer. If a vessel must be registered, it is unlawful to operate or allow others to operate that vessel unless it is registered and numbered legally.

The registration number and validation decal must be displayed in the following manner:

- The number must be painted, applied as a decal or otherwise affixed to both sides of the bow.
- The number must read from left to right on both sides of the bow.
- The number must be in at least 3-inch-high, plain BLOCK letters.
- The letters must be separated from the numbers by a space or hyphen. For example: "LA 3717 ZW" or "LA-3717-ZW."
- The color of the number must contrast with its background.
- No other numbers may be displayed on either side of the bow.

- The decal must be affixed on both sides of the vessel within 6 inches of the registration number.

The registration application and renewal forms are available from:

- The Boat Registration office of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
- The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' website.
- Any Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries district office.

Other Facts About Registration

A Certificate of Number is valid for three years from the date issued. Registrations must be renewed within 60 days of the expiration date.

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries must be notified of a change of address within 15 days.

Numbered vessels that have been sold, lost, destroyed or abandoned, must be reported to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries within 15 days.

Numbered vessels that have been stolen must be reported to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries within 5 days.

If the Certificate of Number or decal is lost or destroyed, the owner must apply to Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries for a duplicate and submit a processing fee within 15 days of the loss.

Vessels registered in another state or country may operate on Louisiana waters for 90 consecutive days. After that time, Louisiana registration and numbering are required.

Larger recreational vessels, owned by U.S. citizens, may (at the owner's option) be documented by the USCG.

New Registration

Proof of ownership, such as a copy of the bill of sale, invoice, or manufacturer's statement of origin, must accompany new applications. Proof of payment of state and local taxes must be indicated on the bill of sale or invoice, or ownership documents must be accompanied by a Tax Certification Form.

New applications are required for vessels coming into Louisiana from another state if they have never been registered in Louisiana. If the vessel is 10 or fewer years old, owners must possess the out-of-state registration or title, a bill of sale (an original document, notarized if not from a dealership), and a completed Tax Certification Form (form 1331). If out-of-state registration or title is unavailable, a certified original letter from the state indicating that the vessel is departing that state's jurisdiction, acknowledging the status of the vessel, or documentation of vessel origination is required.

Louisiana law requires that homemade vessels without a Hull Identification Number that are applying for new registration must first be inspected.

Transfer of Registration

The current registration number must appear on all applications for transfer of ownership. In addition to the application, the owner must provide proof of ownership by means of an original notarized bill of sale (with a raised seal), signed by the previous owner or the previous owner's Louisiana Boat Registration Certificate with the reassignment of ownership on the reverse side completed and signed by the previous owner.

Hull Identification Number

The Hull Identification Number (HIN) is a unique, 12-digit number assigned to vessels built after 1972 by the manufacturer.

Hull Identification Numbers serve to distinguish vessels from one another. HINs are engraved in the fiberglass or on a metal plate attached to the transom.

In the event of warranty problems or if the vessel is lost or stolen, the owner should record the Hull Identification Number and store that information safely in a place other than the vessel.

Owners of vessels manufactured before October 1, 1972, or homemade vessels without HINs must request an inspection by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Upon approval, an agent of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries will stamp an identification number on the hull.

It is unlawful to remove or alter the Hull Identification Numbers.

5. Maximum Loading and Horsepower

Louisiana law states that it is unlawful to operate a vessel in a dangerous manner. This includes:

- **Overloading:** Loading the vessel beyond its safe carrying capacity, giving consideration to the weather and other operating conditions.
- **Overpowering:** Equipping the vessel with a motor that is beyond its safe power capacity, giving consideration to the type and construction of the vessel and other operating conditions.

All boaters must follow the guidelines set forth on the USCG capacity plate attached to the vessel.

6. Equipment and Lighting Requirements

The State of Louisiana does not have any equipment and lighting requirements in addition to federal requirements. All boats operating on Louisiana 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. Those 12 years or younger when onboard a Class A or Class 1 motorboat or vessel must wear a PFD while underway.

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.

7. Marine Sanitation Devices (MSDs)

The discharge of untreated sewage into Louisiana waters is prohibited. Recreational vessels with installed toilet facilities must have an operable marine sanitation device (MSD). Vessels 65 feet in length or under may use a Type I, II, or III MSD. Vessels greater than 65 feet must install a Type II or III MSD.

8. Muffling Devices

Excessive engine noise can prevent a vessel operator from hearing voices and signals. All vessel engines must be equipped with underwater exhaust, an efficient muffler or other effective muffling device.

9. Boating Accidents

An operator involved in a boating accident must stop his or her vessel at the scene of the accident immediately and:

Provide assistance to anyone injured in the accident and minimize any danger caused by the accident, unless doing so would seriously endanger his or her passengers or vessel.

Provide in writing to anyone injured from the accident and to the owner of any damaged property the operator's name, address and identifying number of his or her vessel.

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries must be notified, as follows. The vessel operator must report the accident in writing to Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries within 48 hours if a person dies or is injured. The operator must report the accident in writing to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries within 5 days if damage to the vessel and other property exceeds \$200. Accident report forms may be obtained at any office of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

10. Vessel Speed Restrictions

It is unlawful to operate a vessel in a careless manner or at a rate of speed that would not allow the vessel to stop within the assured clear distance ahead. Operators must operate their vessels within posted Idle Speed or No-Wake Speed zones. Idle speed is the slowest speed possible to maintain steering without creating a wake.

11. Mooring to Markers or Buoys

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

12. Reckless and Careless Operation

Under Louisiana law, the following dangerous operating practices are prohibited:

- Reckless Operation: Operating a vessel in such a way as to cause danger to others or their property. Examples of unlawful, reckless operation include:
 - Boating in a restricted area (i.e., a marked swimming area)
 - Weaving through congested waterway traffic
 - Swerving at the last possible moment to avoid a collision
 - Chasing, harassing or otherwise disturbing wildlife and
 - Operating at greater than idle speed in posted no-wake zones.
- Careless Operation: Operating a vessel in a careless way or at a rate of speed that would not allow the vessel to come to a stop within the assured clear distance ahead. Examples of careless operation include:
 - Causing danger or damage from the wake of your vessel.
 - Operating a vessel at speeds that may cause danger, injury, or damage. All regulatory markers, including those marked as "no-wake," must be obeyed.
- Riding on the Bow or Gunwales: Allowing passengers to ride in circumstances where there may be a chance of falling overboard while underway on a powerboat 26 feet or less in length is prohibited unless there are adequate guards or a railing to prevent such falls.
- Unsafe Conditions: Operating a vessel in a condition hazardous to the occupants or others on the waterways is unlawful. Enforcement officers may instruct the operator to take corrective action or return to port immediately if:
 - There are insufficient PFDs, ventilation or navigation lights, fire extinguishers or backfire flame arrestors.
 - The vessel is overloaded or overpowered.
 - Fuel is leaking from the vessel.

13. Interference with Navigation

It is unlawful to:

- Anchor a vessel under a bridge or in the traveled portion of a river or channel in such a way that the anchored vessel interferes with the safe passage of another vessel through the same area.
- Moor or attach a vessel to a beacon, light, buoy (except a mooring buoy), or any other navigational aid placed on public waters by proper authorities.

- Obstruct a boat ramp, pier, wharf or access to any facility.

14. Boating Under the Influence

Operating a vessel of any kind or manipulating water skis, surfboard or similar device while intoxicated or under the influence of drugs is prohibited.

A person is considered intoxicated if he or she:

- Has a blood alcohol concentration of 0.08% or greater and is 21 years of age or older
- Has a blood alcohol concentration of 0.02% or greater and is under 21 years of age.

It is also unlawful for the owner or person in charge of a vessel to knowingly allow a person who is intoxicated or under the influence of drugs to operate the vessel. Penalties for operating a vessel of any kind or manipulating water skis, surfboard or similar device while intoxicated or under the influence of drugs include a fine of up to \$1,000, imprisonment for up to six months, or both. By operating a vessel on Louisiana waters, operators have consented to be tested for alcohol or drugs if arrested by a law enforcement officer.

15. Mandatory Violator Education

A person who violates the mandatory boater education requirements (see sections 2 and 3, above) is subject to fines (set forth in R.S. 56:31), except, if he or she completes a NASBLA-approved boating safety class within one year after final adjudication, he or she will not be required to pay the fines. If a violator provides proof within 30 days of the hearing on the matter, a hearing will not be required and the violation will be expunged from the person's record.

16. PWC Regulations

It is unlawful for anyone under the age of 13 years to operate a personal watercraft (PWC).

A person who owns or has charge of a PWC is prohibited from knowingly allowing a person under the age of 13 years to operate the PWC. It is also unlawful for a rental company (livery) to rent a PWC to anyone under 13 years of age.

Each person riding on a PWC must wear a USCG-approved Type I, II, III, or V PFD (life jacket).

An operator of a PWC with a lanyard-type ignition safety switch must attach the lanyard to his or her person, clothing, or PFD.

It is unlawful to operate a PWC between sunset and sunrise.

PWCs must be operated in a careful and responsible way. Therefore, it is unlawful for PWC operators to weave the PWC through congested waterway traffic, jump the wake of another vessel when visibility is obstructed or operate in a manner that requires swerving at the last possible moment to avoid a collision.

It is unlawful to chase, harass or otherwise disturb wildlife with a PWC.

17. Water Ski Regulations

A vessel towing a person(s) on water skis or any other device must have at least two competent persons onboard – the operator and a second person onboard to observe the person(s) being towed.

This law does not apply to vessels operated by a person at least 16 years old and equipped with a wide-angle, convex rearview mirror at least 7 inches x 14 inches in size, positioned so the operator can observe the person(s) being towed.

This law does not apply to PWCs.

This law does not apply to vessels engaged in authorized water skiing tournaments or competitions.

It is unlawful to tow a person(s) on water skis, surfboard or similar devices between the hours of one hour after sunset to one hour before sunrise. The operator of the towing vessel and the skier must operate in safety. So as not to endanger the life or property of others, a reasonable distance from other vessels, people, and property must be maintained. Louisiana law prohibits

anyone from manipulating water skis, surfboards, or similar devices while intoxicated or under the influence of drugs. It is strongly recommended that all persons being towed behind a vessel on water skis or any other similar device wear a USCG-approved PFD (life jacket).

18. Divers-down Flag

Scuba divers and snorkelers must display a Divers-Down flag marking their diving areas. When vessel operators observe a displayed Divers-Down flag, they must keep their vessels at least 100 feet away from the flag.

19. Liveries (Rental Agencies)

It is unlawful for a rental company to rent a PWC to anyone under 13 years of age.

20. Other State-Specific Regulations

Marine Events

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries must be notified prior to such events as races, regattas or tournaments. If the event is being held on federally controlled waters, a permit from the USCG is also required.

Local Regulations

State of Louisiana Some waterways in Louisiana have special regulations in addition to federal and/or state requirements. These include horsepower restrictions, speed limits and restricted boating areas. For example, recreational boating is allowed in bayous and canals, but motorized boats are prohibited in isolated water bodies (ponds, borrow pits) and in other areas designated for use by non-motorized boats only. Airboat use is not permitted in refuge areas. Visitors are cautioned that motorboat travel in the refuges may be hazardous because of rough water, fog, vegetation, and swells from barges, towboats, and crew boats. Designated No Wake Zones throughout the refuges must be observed by boat operators. Fishermen should also be aware that refuges have special refuge fishing regulations; however, state waterways flowing through refuge areas, including Lacassine Bayou, Streeter's Canal between the Mermentau River and Lacassine Bayou, and the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, are not subject to these restrictions. To ensure compliance with local regulations affecting refuge areas and other waterways, operators should contact the local governing authority before taking a boat to these areas.

21. Environmental Awareness

Aquatic Nuisance Species

Bringing non-native species into Louisiana 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 areas, such organisms often thrive, choking out native species and damaging the water resource.

How You Can Help

To help prevent the spread of aquatic nuisance species, boat owners/operators should:

- Inspect the vessel and trailer, removing any plants and animals before leaving the waterbody.
- Drain the motor, live well, and bilge on land before leaving the waterbody.
- Empty the bait bucket on land. Live bait should not be released into a waterbody, and aquatic animals should not be taken from one waterbody to another.
- The vessel, trailer, and equipment should be rinsed off.
- Vessels and equipment should be air-dried for as long as possible.

Additional Information

For more information on Louisiana boating law refer to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries at: <http://www.wlf.state.la.us/apps/netgear/index.asp?cn=lawlf&pid=52>, Louisiana Revised Statutes Title 34 – Navigation and Shipping, Part IV – Motorboats and Vessels at <http://www.legis.state.la.us/lss/tsrssearch.htm>, Rules of the Road for Vessels [esp. Chapter 3, Section 301, LR 29:1835 (September 2003)], and Louisiana Boating Information List (dated 5/31/2002).