

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

State-Specific Boating Safety Requirements

1. Law Enforcement Authority

The officers of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), and any other authorized peace officer or law enforcement officer may enforce the boating laws of Mississippi. Enforcement personnel have the authority to stop and board vessels to check for compliance with state and federal laws. The USCG also has enforcement authority on all federally controlled waters.

2. Age Restrictions

In the State of Mississippi, anyone under 12 years of age cannot operate a motorboat unless he or she has taken a boating safety course and is accompanied by an adult of 21 years of age. Proof of completion of the course must be carried onboard while the vessel is in operation.

3. Boater Safety Education Requirements

Anyone born after June 30, 1980, must successfully complete an approved boating safety course prior to operating any motorized vessel. Proof of course completion must be carried on board while the vessel is operating.

4. Vessel Registration

Mississippi law requires all sailboats and every vessel equipped with propulsion machinery using the territorial and navigable waters of the State to be registered and numbered for identification. Vessels registered with the USCG are exempt from registration requirements in the State of Mississippi. The owner of any vessel required to be numbered or registered must do so within 10 days from the date of acquisition. The following fees apply:

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| Less than 16 feet | \$ 9.20 |
| 16 feet but less than 26 feet | \$24.20 |
| 26 feet and over | \$46.70 |
| Dealer number | \$39.20 |
| Duplicate | \$ 6.70 |

Number and validation stickers are placed on both port and starboard sides. The numbers shall read from left to right and shall be in block characters not less than 3" in height. The validation stickers should be displayed within six inches of the beginning of the numbers.

Boats built after 1972 must have a 12-digit hull identification number. This number is required on the application for registration.

A vessel properly registered in another state may operate on Mississippi waters for a period not to exceed 60 consecutive days.

5. Maximum Loading and Horsepower

The State of Mississippi 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:
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 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 also illegal. In many states, there are fines and penalties for exceeding capacity recommendations, including carrying more than the maximum number of people.

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 Mississippi 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.

Mandatory PFD Usage

All children 12 years and under must wear a USCG-approved PFD while on a recreational vessel less than 26 feet in length that is underway unless they are in an enclosed cabin or below deck.

7. Marine Sanitation Devices

Mississippi law prohibits discharge of any sewage, treated or untreated, into the state's freshwaters. Recreational vessels with installed toilet facilities must have onboard an operable marine sanitation device (MSD). All installed devices must be USCG certified. Type III MSDs must have the "Y"-valve secured to prevent waste from being discharged into the water. Boats 65 feet and under may use a Type I, II or III MSD. Boats over 65 feet must install a Type II or III MSD. U.S. Coast Guard-certified devices are so labeled, except for some holding tanks, which are certified by definition under the regulations.

8. Muffling Devices

To reduce noise, motorboat engines must be equipped with factory-installed mufflers, exhaust water manifolds or other effective muffling system.

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, or the vessel. Boating accidents must be reported to the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks. The following must be reported:

- Any boating accident involving death must be reported within 48 hours.
- Any other boating accident resulting in injury requiring medical treatment beyond first aid or property damage greater than \$100 must be reported within 5 days.

10. Vessel Speed Restrictions

All boats must comply with posted speed regulation signs. Idle speed and no wake zones, especially around swim areas, divers down flags, and docks, must be observed.

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.

12. Reckless and Careless Operation

Reckless operation of a vessel, water skis or similar device is a serious offense in Mississippi. 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.
- Disturbing, harassing or chasing wildlife with a vessel.
- 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.

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 Mississippi in a way that may endanger the operation of watercraft or conflict with the marking system prescribed by the State of Mississippi.

14. Boating Under the Influence

In Mississippi, 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. The blood alcohol intoxication level in Mississippi is 0.10% concentration or greater. By operating on Mississippi waterways, you are deemed to have given consent to be tested for alcohol if arrested for operating under the influence.

Penalties for a boating under the influence conviction are as follows:

A) First conviction - Fine no less than \$250.00 or more than \$1,000.00, or imprisonment in jail for not more than two days or both. Violators must also complete a boating safety course.

B) Second conviction (within a five-year period) - Fine no less than \$600.00 nor more than \$1,000.00; and imprisonment not less than 48 consecutive hours nor more than one year or community service work for not less than ten days nor more than one year. Court shall order violator not to operate a watercraft for one year.

C) Third conviction (within a five-year period) - Fine no less than \$800.00 nor more than \$1,000.00; and imprisonment not less than thirty days nor more than one year.

Court shall order violator not to operate a watercraft for two years.

D) Conviction of a fourth or subsequent violation (within a five-year period) is a FELONY OFFENSE. Fine no less than \$2,000.00 and no more than \$5,000.00; and imprisonment in the state penitentiary for not less than 90 days and no more than five years. Court shall order violator not to operate a watercraft for three years.

15. Mandatory Violator Education

A person convicted of boating under the influence is required by law to successfully complete a boating safety course.

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. Children under 12 years of age must not operate a PWC unless he or she has taken a boating safety course and is accompanied by an adult of 21 years of age. Proof of completion of the course must be carried onboard while the vessel is operating. PWC operators and passengers must also wear an approved Type I, II, III or V PFD. Type V inflatable Pads are not approved for use on PWCs.

17. Water Ski Regulations

When operating a vessel for the purpose of towing someone on skis, a tube or similar device, an observer other than the boat operator must be onboard the vessel. The observer must be above 10 years of age. It is also highly recommended that the skier wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved flotation device.

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. Scuba divers, skin divers and snorkelers must mark their diving area by means of a diver's down flag. In Mississippi it is highly recommended that vessel operators keep a distance of at least 100 yards between the flag and their boats when on state waters.

19. Liveries (Rental Agencies)

The certificate of number of a livery boat shall be plainly marked "livery boat." Original and renewal certificate of number of a livery boat shall be valid for a period of 2 years and will expire at midnight on June 30 of each biennium.

The requirement of possessing a certificate of completion of a boater safety education course does not apply to any person operating a motorboat that is rented from a person engaged in the business of renting motorboats.

20. Other State-Specific Regulations

Some waterbodies in Mississippi may have specific rules regulating vessel size and horsepower. The local governing body of the county or municipality where the waterbody is located should be consulted before going out.

21. Environmental Awareness

While a single boat or PWC on state rivers, lakes and coastal waters may seem to have insignificant effect, the combined effects of many boats can cause significant environmental impacts. If Mississippi waters, wildlife and aquatic vegetation are to be preserved and protected, each person must take action to ensure the future preservation of these resources.

Waterways can be kept clean and disease-free by the proper disposal of waste and litter:
If your boat is equipped with an installed toilet (marine sanitation device), no sewage must be discharged into the water. Holding tanks must only be emptied at pump-out stations.
Don't throw any litter overboard. Bring all your trash back onshore to dispose of properly. Be sure to retrieve anything that blows overboard.

Fishing line and plastics are deadly for fish and waterfowl and should never be discarded in the water or near shore.

Plastic six-pack holders can trap or strangle birds, fish and other wildlife. These should be properly disposed of on land by first snipping each circle of the holders with scissors.
Remember, if you have room to bring it, you have room to bring it back!

Practice the three Rs -- Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.

Many marinas provide facilities for recycling oil, aluminum, glass and antifreeze. Use these services whenever possible and thank the marina for providing them.

Carry reusable items such as plates, silverware, cups and glasses onboard to reduce waste.
Recycle old fire extinguishers and marine batteries.

Protect the shoreline from erosion and preserve aquatic vegetation:

Reduce throttle to no-wake speed when close to a shoreline or in small rivers to help prevent erosion.

Don't operate in shallow water where your prop or pump intake can stir up bottom sediments and destroy aquatic plants.

Drain the bilge and clean the prop before leaving a waterway. Failure to do so may transport plants or animals from one waterway to another, disrupting the natural balance of the environment.

Be careful using toxic substances on your boat or around the water:

Reduce the amount of detergent you use when cleaning your boat. Always use non-phosphate detergents. Don't use toxic cleaners on your boat.

Don't use toxic paints or other toxic products on your boat. If you must use chemical products on your boat, minimize their use while on the water.

Before the first use of your boat in the spring, drain the antifreeze into a container and properly dispose of it onshore. Never use antifreeze containing ethylene glycol.

When fueling, don't top off the tank. Promptly mop up any fuel spills.

Additional Information

For more information on Mississippi boating law refer to the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks at <http://www.mdwfp.com>, Mississippi Code Title 59 – Ports, Harbors, Landings and Watercraft, Chapter 21 – Boats and Other Vessels (<http://www.mscode.com/free/statutes/59/021/index.htm>), and Chapter 23 – Alcohol Boating Safety Act (<http://www.mscode.com/free/statutes/59/023/index.htm>).