

STATE OF OKLAHOMA

State-Specific Boating Safety Requirements

1. Law Enforcement Authority

The boating laws of the State of Oklahoma are enforced by the Oklahoma Department of Public Safety, Lake Patrol Section, U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) officers, and any other authorized law enforcement officer. 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 Oklahoma, a youth under the age of 12 years may not operate a vessel powered by a motor or combination of motors over 10 horsepower, a personal watercraft (PWC), or a sail-powered vessel 16 feet or more in length. A child 12 to 15 years of age is permitted to operate a vessel powered by a motor or combination of motors over 10 hp, a PWC, or a sail-powered vessel 16 feet or more in length ONLY if he or she has successfully completed an approved boating safety education course (or passed a proctored equivalency exam) and has received a Boating Safety Education Certificate, AND he or she is supervised by a competent adult at least 18 years old. If the vessel is a PWC, the adult must be visually supervising within 500 yards of the PWC. If the vessel is other than a PWC, the supervising adult must be on board the vessel and in a position to take immediate control of the vessel.

3. Boater Safety Education Requirements

Boating safety education is required for those ages 12 to 15 who wish to operate a vessel powered by a motor or combination of motors over 10 hp, a personal watercraft (PWC), or a sail-powered vessel 16 feet or more in length. In addition, these operators must be supervised by a competent adult at least 18 years old.

In Oklahoma it is strongly recommended that boat operators become certified in boating safety. By becoming certified a vessel operator will have a safer, more enjoyable experience on the water and will be eligible for a discount on boat insurance. To become certified, an operator must successfully complete a National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA)-approved course.

4. Vessel Registration

A person must have a valid Oklahoma Certificate of Registration and validation decal to legally operate a boat on Oklahoma waters. The only exceptions are:

- Boats registered in other states using Oklahoma waters for 60 days or less.
- Boats documented by the USCG. (Federally documented vessels using Oklahoma waters over 60 days must be registered in Oklahoma and display a current Oklahoma validation decal, but are not required to display the registration number.)

The Certificate of Registration and validation decals may be obtained in person at any Oklahoma motor license agent (i.e., tag agent), or by submitting by mail the proper application and fee to:

Oklahoma Tax Commission
Motor Vehicle Division
2501 North Lincoln Blvd.
Oklahoma City, OK 73194

The Certificate of Registration must be onboard and available for inspection by an enforcement officer at all times.

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

- The number must be painted, applied as a decal or otherwise affixed to both sides of the bow, as high above the waterline as possible.
- The number must read from left to right on both sides of the bow.
- The number must be in at least three-inch-high and one-half-inch stroke BLOCK letters.
- The number must be maintained to be legible.
- The number's color must contrast with its background.
- Letters must be separated from the numbers by a space or hyphen. For example: "OK 3717 ZW" or "OK-3717-ZW."
- No other numbers may be displayed on either side of the bow.
- Decals must be affixed on both sides of the bow, behind (towards stern) and in-line with the number.

At the option of the vessel owner, registration may be valid for a one- or three-year period. Registration expires on June 30 of the year shown on the registration decal. Renewal can be done by mail or in person at a motor license agent office or at an office of the Oklahoma Tax Commission.

Registering and Titling Outboard Motors

Outboard motors over 10 horsepower must be titled and have a current Certificate of Registration. Application for a title and for registration of an outboard motor is made separately from the boat and must also be made within 30 days of purchase or transfer. Titling and registering a boat and outboard motor will require completion of two of the application forms – one for the boat and one for the motor.

At the option of the vessel owner, registration may be valid for a one- or three-year period. Registration expires on June 30 of the year shown on the registration decal. Renewal can be done by mail or in person at a motor license agent office or at an office of the Oklahoma Tax Commission.

Owners of registered motors are issued a motor registration decal that should be displayed on the upper backside of the motor cowling extending from the left side to the rear.

5. Maximum Loading and Horsepower

Before operating a vessel, check the manufacturer's capacity plate usually located near the operator's position or on the boat's transom. This plate indicates the maximum weight capacity or maximum number of people that the boat can safely carry as well as the maximum horsepower that the boat can handle. It is unlawful to load a boat beyond the recommended capacity shown on the capacity plate.

The State of Oklahoma maximum loading and horsepower requirements are consistent with federal regulations. In addition, an exemption is provided as follows:

The Commissioner of Public Safety or an officer of the Lake Patrol Section of the Oklahoma Highway Patrol may, upon written application from the vessel owner, exempt any vessel from the requirements of this section if, after an inspection by the Commissioner or officer, it is determined that compliance would not materially contribute to and enhance the safe operation of the vessel.

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 USCG (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 Oklahoma 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 under the age of 13 wear a USCG-approved PFD while on a recreational vessel under than 26 feet in length that is underway, unless they are in an enclosed cabin or below deck.

7. Marine Sanitation Devices

State law prohibits boats from discharging any sewage, treated or untreated, into fresh waters of Oklahoma. If a recreational boat has installed toilet facilities, it should have an operable marine sanitation device (MSD) onboard. All installed devices should be USCG-certified. If a vessel is outfitted with a Type III MSD, waste must be discharged on shore into a pump-out facility. Larger boats utilizing a Type I or II MSD must have the "Y"-valve secured so that waste cannot be discharged into the water.

8. Muffling Devices

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

- Using cutouts;
- Removing mufflers or muffler baffles;
- Cutting or punching holes in mufflers; and
- Modifying the original muffler or muffling system in away that increases noise level.

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. Anyone involved in a boating accident must give his or her name, address and Certificate of Registration information in writing to any injured person and to the owner of any damaged property. Reports of deaths or disappearances must be made by the quickest means possible to the local police department, county sheriffs office, or highway patrol office.

In addition, the following must be reported in writing to the Lake Patrol Section of the Oklahoma Highway Patrol:

- Any boating accident involving death, injury requiring medical treatment beyond first aid, or the disappearance of a person (should be reported as soon as possible).
- All boating accidents involving property damage greater than \$500.

If an operator 16 years old or older, operating in a reckless manner, causes an accident resulting in the death of another person (either immediately or within one year of the accident), the operator will be guilty of negligent homicide.

10. Vessel Speed Restrictions

Always operate a boat within posted speed restrictions and maintain a proper speed or distance while operating a boat or PWC or while towing a person on water skis or any similar device. Where there are signs or buoys marking "Idle Speed" or "Slow – No Wake Speed" zones, an operator must reduce speed to slowest possible speed necessary to maintain steerage. A boat should not create a wake at this speed.

It is unlawful to:

- Operate, or give permission to operate, a boat or PWC at speeds greater than are reasonable or proper given the existing waterway traffic, persons in the water and weather conditions.
- Exceed any posted speed limits.
- Operate, or give permission to operate, a boat or PWC at greater than no-wake or idle speed in a posted no-wake zone.
- Operate, or give permission to operate, a boat or PWC at greater than no-wake or idle speed within 150 feet of:
 - Any boat ramp,
 - A dock or pier, or
 - An anchored or moored boat.
 - Operate a boat or PWC at speeds greater than 10 miles per hour on public waters within 50 feet of another boat or PWC.

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

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, parasails, 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 other 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.
- Failing to stop or yield to an authorized emergency vessel making an audible or visible signal.
- Operating or giving permission to operate a boat or PWC when wind warnings have been posted or other hazardous weather conditions exist that pose a risk to persons or property.

Careless Operation

It is unlawful to operate or give permission to operate a boat or PWC in a way that is not careful and prudent. Examples of careless operation are:

- Parking, mooring, or beaching a boat or PWC at the edge of or within a marked swimming area.
- Causing danger or damage from the wake of a boat.

Improper Speed or Distance

In Oklahoma, the failure to maintain a proper speed or distance while operating a vessel or towing a person on water skis or similar device is unlawful. The following actions are prohibited:

- Exceeding posted speed limits
- Operating, or giving permission to operate, a boat at greater than **no wake** or **idle speed** in a posted no wake zone
- Operating, or giving permission to operate, a vessel at speeds greater than reasonable or proper, giving due consideration to waterway traffic, weather conditions, and persons in the water
- Operating a vessel on Oklahoma public waters at more than 10 miles per hour within 50 feet of another vessel
- Operating, or giving permission to operate, a boat at greater than **no wake** or **idle speed** when within 150 feet of:
 - An anchored or moored vessel
 - A dock or pier
 - Any boat ramp

Overloading

It is unlawful to load a vessel beyond that recommended as shown on the capacity plate installed by the boat's manufacturer.

Riding on Bow, Deck, Gunwale or Seat Back

These actions can result in a passenger falling overboard if the vessel is being operated at greater than idle speed. Specifically, it is unlawful in Oklahoma to:

- Extend an appendage over the edge of a boat above or below the railing or stand on the covered bow of a boat being operated at greater than idle speed.
- Sit or ride on the gunwales or the back on a seat of a boat underway at greater than idle speed.
- Sit or ride on the covered bow, front or back deck of a boat traveling at greater than idle speed if the boat does not have side walkways or walk-through access to these areas, which are surrounded by bow rails, deck rails, or life rails or other enclosures that extend at least 24 inches above the deck.

Hazardous Condition

It is unlawful to operate a boat in Oklahoma in a manner that may cause a hazard to those on board. In the event a hazardous situation is observed by a peace officer, that officer may instruct the vessel operator to return to mooring and stay there until the problem is fixed.

Hazardous conditions include the following circumstances:

- Insufficient personal flotation devices, backfire flame arrestors, navigations lights, or fire extinguishers
- An overpowered or overloaded vessel
- Any other unsafe condition

13. Interference with Navigation

It is unlawful to:

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

14. Boating Under the Influence

In the State of Oklahoma, 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.

Oklahoma law provides:

- It is evidence that a person is "under the influence" if he or she has a blood or breath alcohol concentration of 0.10% or more.
- It is unlawful for the owner of a boat or PWC to allow someone else to operate his or her vessel or PWC while that person is intoxicated.

On a first conviction of operating under the influence of alcohol or drugs, the violator will receive a maximum fine of \$1,000. On a subsequent conviction, the violator will receive a maximum fine of \$2,500 and not less than \$1,000.

By operating a boat or PWC on Oklahoma waters, the operator has consented to be tested for the presence of alcohol, drugs or other intoxicating substances if requested by a peace officer. Failure to submit to testing for the presence of alcohol, drugs or other intoxicating substances is admissible as evidence in trial.

15. Mandatory Violator Education

The State of Oklahoma has no mandatory violator education regulations at this time.

16. PWC Regulations

In Oklahoma, a youth under the age of 12 years may not operate a Personal Watercraft (PWC). To be the sole operator of a PWC, the operator must be 12 years of age or older. In addition, a youth 12 to 15 years of age may only operate a PWC if he or she has successfully completed an approved boating safety education course and has received a Boating Safety Education Certificate. Additionally, he or she must be supervised by a competent adult who is at least 18 years of age, and who is visually supervising within 500 yards of the PWC.

PWCs must be operated in a reasonable and prudent manner at all times. In the State of Oklahoma, it is unlawful to operate in a reckless manner, which includes:

- Operating a PWC at greater than no wake or idle speed within 150 feet of:
 - Any boat ramp,
 - A dock or pier, or
 - An anchored or moored boat.
- Operating a PWC at speeds greater than 10 miles per hour on public waters within 50 feet of another boat or PWC.
- Weaving a PWC through congested traffic.
- Swerving at the last possible moment to avoid a collision.

Operating a PWC between sunset and sunrise is prohibited, unless the PWC is equipped with the required navigation lights. It is also unlawful to chase, harass, or disturb wildlife with a PWC.

Everyone riding on or towed behind a PWC must wear a USCG-approved PFD. If the PWC is equipped with a lanyard-type ignition safety switch, the lanyard must be attached to the person, clothing or PFD of the operator at all times while the PWC is being operated.

17. Water Ski Regulations

Water skiing is allowed with any watercraft that is designed to accommodate two or more people. Boats and PWC towing water skiers or participating in a similar activity must operate in a careful and prudent manner and maintain a reasonable distance from other boats, people

and property so as not to endanger life or property. It is unlawful to cause the person being towed to collide with any object or person. Each person being towed must wear a USCG-approved PFD.

All boats or PWCs being operated for the purpose of towing a person(s) on water skis, a surfboard, parasail or a similar device must have **either** a person at least 8 years old, in addition to the boat operator, onboard observing the towed person(s) **or** the boat has an approved rearview mirror or mirrors mounted such that the operator can face in the direction of travel and be in a position to observe the towed person(s) at all times:

- If the vessel is not a personal watercraft, one wide-angle convex, rearview mirror must be installed
- If the vessel is a personal watercraft, two wide-angle convex, rearview mirrors must be installed.

It is unlawful for boats or PWCs to tow skiers, surfboards, parasails or any device of this type between sunset and sunrise.

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. Boats must remain at least 150 feet away from the flag unless the boat is engaged in the rescue of a person in that area. Divers may not display a Divers-Down flags closer than 100 yards to any functional boat ramp.

19. Liveries (Rental Agencies)

The owner of a boat livery shall keep a record of the name and address of the person or persons hiring any vessel, the identification number of such vessel, the number of occupants of said vessel, the departure date and time, and the expected date and time of return. The record must be kept for at least 6 months.

Neither the owner of a boat livery nor his agent or employee may allow any vessel to be operated or to leave the premises unless it is equipped (by owner or renter) according to the Oklahoma Boating Safety Regulation Act. The owner of a boat livery shall also be required to register their vessels in compliance with the Oklahoma Vessel and Motor Registration Act

20. Other State-Specific Regulations

Marine Events

To hold an event on Oklahoma waters, you must contact, in advance of the event, the agency that has jurisdiction of the waters – such as the United States Army Corps of Engineers, Oklahoma Department of Tourism and Recreation or the Grand River Dam Authority.

After being granted approval to hold the event, the entity responsible for the event must notify the Lake Patrol Section of the Oklahoma Highway Patrol, in writing and at least 15 days prior to the event. The notification must include the date, time, location where the sanctioned event is to be held, the type of event and the person in charge of the event. If an event is being held on federally controlled waters, you must apply for a permit from the USCG at least 30 days prior to the event.

No person may hold, or give permission to hold, any sanctioned event in an unsafe manner or under unsafe environmental conditions so as to endanger life or property. If any duly authorized peace officer determines within their jurisdiction an event is unsafe, the officer has authority to cancel or terminate the event.

Firearms in a Vessel

It is unlawful to transport a shotgun, rifle, or pistol in a vessel or fire such weapons from a vessel except for the purposes of hunting animals or fowl, and in compliance with existing state and federal laws. Those convicted of violating this law may receive a fine up to \$100 and/or imprisonment up to 6 months.

Inner Tubes, Floating Chairs or Similar Devices

Flotation devices designed for the purpose of recreation (i.e. floating chairs, inner tubes, noodles, etc.) may not be used by a swimmer at a distance greater than 50 feet from the shore. Swimmers should also be aware of their surroundings and avoid swimming and playing in areas of high boating traffic such as boat ramps and marinas.

Local Regulations

Many Oklahoma waterways may have specific equipment and operational requirements in addition to state and federal regulations. For example, the Grand River Dam Authority (GRDA) places additional lake rules and regulations on those boating on the Grand Lake of the Cherokees, Lake Hudson and W.R. Holway Reservoir. Before boating, check with the local authorities to ensure that you and your vessel are in compliance with local regulations or visit the Grand River Dam Authority website.

All Oklahoma State boating laws, as well as the following Grand River Dam Authority (GRDA) Lake Rules and Regulations, apply to all GRDA lakes:

- All vessels operating in GRDA lakes must have a current Oklahoma registration and license by June 30th each year.
- All children 12 years of age and younger must wear a USCG approved life preserver at all times when aboard a boat less than 26 feet long.
- All boats kept or operated on GRDA lakes shall be inspected (at no charge) by GRDA's Lake Patrol. A safety inspection sticker must be placed on the port front portion of boat.
- Boat operators must be at least 16 years old and have a valid automobile operator's license, unless under the direct (on board) supervision of a responsible adult.
- Unsupervised PWC operators must be at least 16 years of age. Children ages 12 -15 may operate a PWC if they are visually supervised by a responsible adult and if they are in possession of a Boating Safety Education Certificate.
- Operators of PWCs must stay at least 50 feet away from all moving vessels and must idle around docks and swimmers.
- During nighttime hours, boat speeds must not exceed 35 miles an hour. Lights must be illuminated at all times.
- Water skiing, jet skiing and similar activities are permitted only during daylight hours. Skiing is prohibited upstream from the Strang Bridge on Lake Hudson and above Twin Bridges, in Elm Creek east of Grove water intake tower, above the Harbors Marina on Duck Creek, or above Lakemont Shores ramp on Drowning Creek on Grand.
- With the exception of lake patrol boats, boats powered by internal combustion engines are not permitted on W.R. Holway Reservoir.
- Boats must not be operated within 200 feet of any GRDA dam. When a dam is being generated, boats may not be operated within 500 feet of the dam.

Additional Information

For more information on Oklahoma boating law refer to the Oklahoma Lake Patrol at <http://www.dps.state.ok.us/ohp/aboutlp.htm>, Title 63 – Public Health and Safety, Section 4201 *et seq.* – Oklahoma Boating Safety Regulation Act at <http://www.lsb.state.ok.us/>, and Oklahoma Administrative Rules Title 595 - Department of Public Safety, Chapter 45 - Boating and Water Safety, Section 595:45-1-1, *et seq.*, at <http://www.oar.state.ok.us/oar/codedoc02.nsf>.