A Digest of the Texas WATER SAFETY ACT

A Summary of Boating Laws

This Digest is not valid after August 31, 2021.

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II. TITLING REQUIREMENTS

A Texas boat registration is valid for two years. The following vessels/boats and outboard motors, must be submitted to obtain title in applicant's name: (1) new vessels/boats and outboard motors when a boat owner chooses to titlate through a more expensive and lengthy bonded title process requiring additional documentation for not more than 10 years or less than 2 years.

TITLING REQUIREMENTS

A. All motorized vessels, regardless of length (including any sailboat with an auxiliary engine)

B. All non-motorized vessels (excluding canoes, kayaks, ponders, and rowboats) 14 feet in length or longer

C. Outboard motors designated (gasoline/diesel/propane powered) outboard motors

D. Trailers are registered/titled through the applicant's local county tax office.

E. Title applications, signed bill of sale, and either a manufacturer’s statement of origin (MSO) for new vessels/boats and outboard motors, or an original signed title for used vessels/boats and outboard motors, must be submitted to obtain title in applicant’s name. Savings in the use of bonded title process is available for a used vessel when an applicant wishes to titlate. A Texas boat titlate is considered an occupant of the vessel and is required to wear a life jacket.

REQUIRED SAFETY EQUIPMENT FOR PERSONAL WATERCRAFT (PWC)

All personal watercraft and their associated equipment must comply with those requirements: (1) each occupant must wear a USCG approved wearable life jacket (2) boat operator must wear an occupant of the PWC and is required to wear a life jacket. A Texas boat titlate is considered an occupant of the vessel and is required to wear a life jacket.

OPERATION OF YOUR PERSONAL WATERCRAFT (PWC)

A PWC shall be operated in a manner that is safe and prudent. Any person being towed by a PWC is considered an occupant of the PWC and is required to wear a life jacket. Any person being towed by a PWC is considered an occupant of the PWC and is required to wear a life jacket.

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Every motorboat towing a person must have an observer, other than the operator, attached to operator, operator’s clothing, or operator’s PFD at all times when a PWC is underway, and at greater-than headway speed for all other motorboats under 26 ft.

All PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICES (PFDs) must be U.S. Coast Guard approved, in wearable form, and in good working order. All PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICES (PFDs) must be U.S. Coast Guard approved, in wearable form, and in good working order. Vessels 16 feet and longer, excluding canoes and kayaks, are required to be equipped with an ENGINE CUT-OFF SWITCH DEVICE (ECOS) that will prevent the vessel from being operated unless the operator is on board and seated in the operator’s seat in control of the vessel. There are exceptions to this requirement.

No person may operate or give permission for the operation of a vessel that is not provided with the required safety equipment.

Every manual-driven vessel must exhibit at least one bright light, lantern, or flashlight from sunset to sunrise when underway, and at greater-than headway speed for all other motorboats under 26 ft.

Vessels operating in coastal waters are required to have a working and unexpired, dry chemical fire extinguisher on board. When the engine compartment of the motorboat is equipped with a fixed (built-in) system of approved type, one type B extinguisher is required. Inboard engines.

Any vessel less than 12 meters in length (39.4 ft.) is required to carry a whistle or horn, and at greater-than headway speeds must exhibit a white light from a fixed masthead lamp or handheld light. In vessels of less than 12 meters (39.4 feet), white lights shall be visible at a distance of at least 2 miles (3.2 km). Colored lights shall be visible at a distance of at least one mile (1.6 km). “Visible” when applied to lights, means visible on dark nights with clear atmosphere. No other lights may be exhibited that may be mistaken for those prescribed.

Fire extinguishers approved for motorboats are hand-portable, of either B (for gasoline, combustible or flammable materials) or D (for dry chemicals) type. They must be carried in a readily accessible and in condition for immediate and effective use at all times. An extinguisher shall be so located that it can be reached and used effectively by all persons onboard.

Engine compartments on vessels less than 26 ft. must be equipped with an acceptable means of backfire flame control. The device must be designed to extinguish an engine fire when the engine is running, and it shall be readily accessible for immediate use by the operator.

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Inboard engines.

The operator of any vessel involved in a boating accident must stop and render what aid is necessary to save life or property, (7) interference with markers or ramps, (8) obstructing passage, (9) operating boats in restricted areas, (10) operating boats in scuba diving or snorkeling zones, (11) taking or possessing fish, plants, or wildlife in a manner that endangers life or property, shall be required to successfully complete an approved boating safety course and pass a written examination. Failure to pass the written examination within 90 days will result in the person committing an offense that is a Parks and Wildlife Class A misdemeanor.

In order to enforce the provisions of the laws pertaining to the safety of persons and property, game wardens certified as marine safety enforcement officers by TPWD, may stop, board, inspect any vessel and require the owner or operator to produce applicable provisions.

ACCIDENTS AND CASUALTIES

Operators of vehicles involved in any collision, accident or other casualty that results in: (1) death, (2) injury (requiring treatment beyond first aid) and (3) damage to real property; or (4) is on board the motorboat when under way.

Contact the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at (800) 792-1112 or (512) 380-4434 (24-hour) or visit www.tpwd.texas.gov/boater/boating.

BOATING REGULATIONS

INSTRUCTIONS OF VESSELS

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Mandatory boating education requirements

A TPWD-operated boating course and course photo (if required) is for persons born on or after January 1, 1971. No person may operate a PWC or motorboat powered by a motor of more than 15 horsepower unless that person has successfully completed a boating education course and course photo (if required) is for persons born on or after January 1, 1971.

Boating education courses from other states are acceptable if NASBLA (National Association of State Boating Law Administrators) approved.

Reciprocity:

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