A Digest of the Texas WATER SAFETY ACT

A Summary of Boating Laws

This digest is not valid after August 31, 2025.

Information may change due to legislation, Commission or U.S. Coast guard action.

TITLING REQUIREMENTS

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

• All non-motorized vessels (excludes canoes, kayaks, punts, and rowboats) 14 feet in length or longer, and

• All interstate transport (gasoline/diesel/propane powered) outboard motor(s)

Trailer(s)

• All trailers registered as part of the sales transaction to be acquired and supplied. An abandoned boat or outboard motor may be eligible for titling through the licensed process with appropriate documentation. An "abandoned vessel or outboard motor" is a vessel or outboard motor that has remained on private property without the consent of the owner or person in charge of the property for more than 30 consecutive days.

Vessels Extracted from Titting – All U.S. Coast guard (USCG) documented vessels (documentation must be current), and all non-motorized canoes, kayaks, punts, rowboats, or other vessels under 14 feet in length while paddled, policed, or under way, must always be aboard and available for inspection by an enforcement officer; the registration decal must be affixed in line with and three (3) inches towards the rear of the left portion of the windshield. In the absence of a windshield, the registration decal must be affixed to the certificate of number and made available for inspection when the boat is taken out of service.

REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

A Texas boat registration is valid for two years. The following vessels/boats when on Texas private property must be registered: (1) any vessel, boat, or outboard motor that has remained on private property for more than 30 consecutive days; (2) operate PWC within 50 feet of another PWC, motorboat, vessel, platform, or person, or persons sitting, standing, or kneeling ON the vessel rather than INSIDE the vessel. Includes jet skis, wet bikes, etc. Any person being towed by a PWC is considered a vessel and is required to wear a life jacket.

REQUIRED SAFETY EQUIPMENT FOR PERSONAL WATERCRAFT (PWC)

All personal watercraft (PWC) equipped with an auxiliary engine and used by a person, persons, or any crew member, must meet those requirements (1) each occupant must wear an USCG approved personal flotation device (PFD) while on board, and (2) each PWC must be equipped and maintained in a manner so as to provide adequate safety and minimize risk of injury or death to the operator or occupants. PWC is considered an occupant of the PWC and is required to wear a life jacket.

REQUIRED EQUIPMENT FOR PERSONAL WATERCRAFT (PWC)

All personal watercraft (PWC) that are equipped with an auxiliary engine and used by a person or persons sitting, standing, or kneeling ON a vessel or motorboat, platform, person, or object, or shown at headway speed (headway speed—slow, idle speed, or any speed used only for operation to or from cargo ships, freighters, or offshore oil infrastructure.

Vessels Exempted from titling – Non-motorized canoes, kayaks, punts, rowboats, or rubber rafts (regardless of length), or other vessels under 14 feet in length while paddled, policed, or under way, must always be aboard and available for inspection by an enforcement officer.

SCHEDULE OF FEES

VESSels REGISTRATION

Class A Motorboat (except live boat)

14 feet but less than 16 feet in length...
$32.00

Sailboat (except live boat)

14 feet but less than 16 feet in length...
$32.00

Class B Motorboat

16 feet but less than 26 feet in length...
$53.00

Class C Motorboat

26 feet but less than 40 feet in length...
$110.00

Live boat

40 feet in length and over...
$150.00

Live boat less than 16 feet in length...
$32.00

CERTIFICATE OF NUMBER (REGISTRATION) ID CARD/DECALS

Transfer of ownership (any key TIT/registered title)

$11.00

Transfer/Registration of Livery boat (Key TIT/registered title)

$11.00

Replacement/Restore of number Card

$11.00

Replacement Decal with new Certificate number (required)

$22.00

TExAS cERTIFICATE OF TITLe (VESSel/OUTBOARD MOTOR)

Original title, transfer of title, or standard replacement title...
$27.00

Correction...
$27.00

“Quick” Title (expedited replacement title)

$64.00

OWNERSHIP TRANSFER (SALE, REBIRTH, ABANDONMENT OR DESTRUCTION) OF BOAT/OUTBOARD MOTOR

The recorded owner must present the title to the TPWD within 30 days after the date of sale or transfer.

HOMEMADE BOATS

Homemade boats require an affidavit from the applicant to the origin of the boat and proof of the boat being constructed of the following materials (i.e., inoxanes and hardware dealers for parts, etc.). Homemake boats must be inspected and must pass the normal program test.

HULL IDENTIFICATION AND MOTOR SERIAL NUMBERS

It is illegal to possess or intentionally alter, offer for sale, or purchase a vessel with a hull identification and motor serial number that has been altered, removed, destroyed, defaced, modified, or removed. To acquire registration title for a vessel or outboard motor that has been altered, removed, destroyed, defaced, modified, or removed, a sworn statement will be filed with TPWD describing the reason for the destruction, removal, alteration or defacement of the number. This statement must be accompanied by a document certifying that the certificate from which the vessel or outboard motor was issued has been destroyed.

BOAT SEWAGE DISPOSAL

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ)

Effective April 1, 2003, the Minimum Sewage Disposal System (MSS) is required to be installed on all boats with a safety-related sewage discharge. A vessel equipped with a Class 4 MSS system (to include those vessels equipped with a Class 3 MSS system) is required to install a complete Sanitation Device (MSD) when any of these vessel types are motorized.

Homemade boats require an affidavit from the applicant to the origin of the boat and proof of the boat being constructed of the following materials (i.e., inoxanes and hardware dealers for parts, etc.). Homemake boats must be inspected and must pass the normal program test.

tpwd.texas.gov/boating
OPERATING VESSELS WITHOUT REQUIRED EQUIPMENT PROHIBITED

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

LIFE PRESERVING DEVICES

All PERSONAL FLotation DEVICES (PFDs) must be U.S. Coast Guard approved, in good working condition, of the correct size for each occupant, and readily available. Any vessel under 13 years of age or in all vessels under 26 feet in length must wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved PFD while underway. Underwear means not at anchor, made fast to the shore, or aground. All vessels, including canoes, kayaks, and rafts, must be equipped with one USCG approved whistle for the activity taking place for each person on board. A USCG approved whistle must be accompanied by one whistle. If the whistle is not inscribed with specific instructions on the label of the device, Figure 1, 2 feet and smaller, excluding canoes and kayaks, are required to be equipped with one Type IV throwable PFD in addition to the USCG approved whistling device required for each person on board. Inflatable PFDs are authorized only when used in accordance with requirements as presented on U.S. Coast Guard approval labels.

MARINE ENGINE (ECOS) DEVICE

If the vessel is equipped, the cut-off, start-up, linkage, or wireless device must be attached to operator, operator’s clothing, or operator’s PFD at all times when a PWC is underway and at all times when a PWC is at anchor, made fast to the shore, or aground. The operator of the vessel is also responsible for verifying that the ECOS system is operation.

MIRRORS REQUIRED

Manually Driven Vessels: Manually driven vessels when paddled, policed, oared, or sailing.

A vessel less than 20 feet (6.1 meters) in length other than a PWC. The operator of the vessel is also responsible for verifying that the ECOS system is operation.

Vessels in all weather and during restricted visibility.

All other manually driven vessels may exhibit sidelights and a sternlight, or shall exhibit at least one bright light, lantern or flashlight from sunset to sunrise when not at dock.

In vessels of less than 12 meters (39.4 feet), white lights shall be visible at a distance of at least two (2) miles. Colored lights shall be visible at a distance of at least one (1) mile. “Visible” when applied to lights, means visible on dark nights with clear atmosphere. No lights may be used that are visible at a distance greater than the allowable.

In vessels of less than 12 feet (3.7 meters) in length required to carry a whistle or horn, and a bell. If the whistle is not inscribed with specific instructions on the label of the device, Figure 1, 2 feet and smaller, excluding canoes and kayaks, are required to be equipped with one Type IV throwable PFD in addition to the USCG approved whistling device required for each person on board. Inflatable PFDs are authorized only when used in accordance with requirements as presented on U.S. Coast Guard approval labels.

EXHAUST WATER MANIFOLD; MUFFLER

A muffler must have an exhaust water manifold in a factory type muffler installed on the engine.

VISUAL DISTRESS SIGNALS

Vessels operating in coastal waters are required to carry an unexpired, visible, quick-burning distress signal:

• 2 5-B OR 1 20-B
• 3 5-B OR 1 20-B and 1 5-B

BOATING REGULATIONS

In order to enforce the provisions of the Texas Safety Code, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department may order, at their discretion, any vessel to be seized for noncompliance with applicable laws. INCIDENTS AND CASUALTIES

Operators of vessels involved in any accident, incident or other casualty that results in:

• Death or serious bodily injury;
• Injury requiring treatment beyond first aid;
• Property damage exceeding $2,000 must report the incident to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at (800) 792-1112 or 792-1111 (24 hour-911), or sheriff, police, or fire department.

Contact the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at (800) 792-1112 or (512) 799-3544 (24 hour-911).

STOP AND RENDER AID

The operator of any vessel involved in a boating incident must stop and render whatever assistance is necessary unless the operator is engaged in similar activity.

The operator must give his/her name, address and vessel identification number in writing to the person injured and to the owner of any damaged property. Failure to do so in an incident that results in death or serious bodily injury is punishable as a Texas Parks and Wildlife Class B misdemeanor.

Fire extinguishers are required in all other manually driven vessels such as boats, rafts, seaplanes, airplanes, and motorized vehicles other than those covered above.

All other manually driven vessels may exhibit sidelights and a sternlight, or shall exhibit at least one bright light, lantern or flashlight from sunset to sunrise when not at dock.

In vessels of less than 12 meters (39.4 feet), white lights shall be visible at a distance of at least two (2) miles. Colored lights shall be visible at a distance of at least one (1) mile. “Visible” when applied to lights, means visible on dark nights with clear atmosphere. No lights may be used that are visible at a distance greater than the allowable.

All vessels, including motorboats, motorized sailboats, canoes, kayaks, rafts, rubber rafts, or other vessels when not docked must have at least one bright light, lantern or flashlight from sunset to sunrise in all weather and during restricted visibility.

Navigation Lights

Power Drive/Vessels Under 26 Feet:

Vessels of less than 20 meters (66 ft.): up to more than 12 meters (39 ft.) shall exhibit navigation lights as shown in Figure 1, 2 feet in length (4.6 meters) in length, shall show the lights in either Figure 1 or Figure 2.