

## **Excerpts from Mass State Boating Law Summary**

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-boating-law-summary>

### **Minimum Age Restrictions**

No person under 12 years of age may operate a motorboat, unless accompanied on-board and directly supervised by a competent person 18 years of age or older. Personal watercraft (PWC) users must still be at least 16 years of age in order to operate, with no exceptions.

### **Safety Education Certification**

Starting April 1, 2026, a valid boater safety certificate will be required for all individuals operating motorboats and PWCs in Massachusetts.

#### Who Needs a Certificate?

Born after January 1, 1989:

- Must obtain a certificate by April 1, 2026.,
- No penalties will be enforced until September 1, 2026.

Born on or before January 1, 1989:

- Must obtain a certificate before April 1, 2028.
- All operators of motorboats and PWCs will be required to carry proof of completion of an approved boater education course while on the water.

### **Requirements for Youth Operators**

The following regulations are in effect until March 31, 2026:

- Ages 12 to 15
  - Must complete an approved basic boating course to operate a motorboat without adult supervision.
  - Upon successfully completing the course, students will receive a state-issued "boating safety certificate." This certificate must be kept in the possession of the certified operator when on the water.
- Ages 16 to 17
  - Individuals who wish to operate personal watercraft must also complete an approved boating course.
- Under 16
  - Youth under the age of 16 are not allowed to operate personal watercraft.
- Under 12
  - Youth under the age of 12 are not allowed to operate a motorboat unless supervised by an adult.

To view the new law in its entirety, please visit Session Law - Acts of 2024 Chapter 350.

### **Accident Reporting:**

The operator of any motorboat involved in an accident which results in personal injury, death, or property damage (over \$500) shall immediately notify the MA Environmental Police and file the appropriate accident report within the required time frame. (2 days-fatality; 5 days - all other accidents)

### **Safety Equipment:**

Most of the state equipment carriage requirements are similar to federal laws. This primary list includes personal flotation devices (PFDs) fire extinguishers, signaling devices, visual distress signals, and navigation lights.

“Throwable personal flotation device”, a personal flotation device that is intended to be thrown to a person in the water, including personal flotation devices marked as Type IV or Type V with Type IV performance; provided, however, that unless specifically marked otherwise, a wearable personal flotation device shall not be considered a throwable personal flotation device.

“Wearable personal flotation device”, a personal flotation device that is intended to be worn or otherwise attached to the body, including personal flotation devices marked as Type I, Type II, Type III or Type V with Type I, II or III performance.

Every vessel not less than 16 feet shall have a throwable personal flotation device that is readily accessible and in good and serviceable condition.

In Massachusetts, PFDs are required to be worn by:

1. Youth under 12 years of age
2. Personal watercraft users
3. Water skiers
4. Canoeists/kayakers from September 15 - May 15

Boat owners or operators are responsible for ensuring that passengers on-board wear PFDs as required.

Additionally, the state requires:

- All motorboats, except for personal watercraft, be equipped with an anchor, manual bailer, and line.
- A paddle or an oar is required on boats less than 16 feet in length.
- Motorboats towing skiers must be equipped with a boarding ladder.
- Registration and numbering of all boats powered by machinery is required.

### **Prohibited Operation:**

The following types of operation are extremely unsafe and are prohibited:

- Operating any vessel under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Operators with blood alcohol concentration of .08 BAC are presumed to be impaired in Massachusetts. Penalties may include the loss of a motor vehicle driver's license, loss of vessel registration, significant fines and jail time.
- Operating a motorboat within **150 feet** of a swimming area, whether public or private.
- Operating at an excessive speed considering weather conditions, boat traffic, and other hazards. For inland waters, operating at a speed greater than 45 mph is considered negligent operation.
- Operating a motorboat without properly working navigation lights.
- Operating a motorboat during the nighttime while towing waterskiers, tubers, etc.

- Operating at greater than headway speed (6 mph or less) within **150 feet** of a swimmer, waterskier, mooring area, marina, boat launch, or when the operator's vision is obscured in any way.
- Operating in an overloaded condition (carrying total weight that exceeds capacity plate recommendations or is excessive considering water conditions)
- Operating with passengers on the bow, gunwales, or any other place where there may be a chance of falling overboard.

### **Personal Watercraft Operation**

Personal watercraft (PWC) are considered motorboats by law and must comply with all boating laws and navigation rules, including the speed and operation provisions above.

Additionally, PWC users must adhere to state regulations specific to personal watercraft operation:

- Wear an approved life jacket (PFD) at all times (operator and passengers).
- Attach the **safety lanyard** to the operator and the **cutoff/kill switch**.
- Always operate at slow, no-wake speed (6 mph or less) within **150 feet** of a swimmer, the shoreline, a water-skier, a boat launch, a raft or float or a moored or docked boat

### **You must not operate a PWC:**

- If less than 16 years old
- Under the influence of alcohol
- Between sunset and sunrise
- At high speed in congested areas
- On waters under 75 acres
- While towing persons on skis, tubes, etc.

### **Please note**

This is only a summary of boating laws. All boaters must know and observe all local, state, and federal laws. For further information on boating laws, boating education, or to obtain accident report forms contact the Massachusetts Environmental Police at (508) 564-4961

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