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THE HANDBOOK

of Tennessee Boating Laws and Responsibilities



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THE HANDBOOK

of Tennessee Boating Laws and Responsibilities

Disclaimer: ***This publication is NOT a legal document.***
It is a summary of Tennessee's current boating safety rules and regulations at the time of printing.

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Where to Find Additional Information

This handbook is a guide to Tennessee boating laws for recreational boaters.

- To stay up to date on new boating laws, contact the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency:
  - Call us at **615-781-6538**.
  - Visit our website at **www.tnwildlife.org**.
- For federal boating laws, visit the U.S. Coast Guard's boating safety website at **www.uscgboating.org**.

Information in this handbook does not replace what is specifically legal for boating in Tennessee, which is found in the Tennessee Boating Safety Act and federal laws.

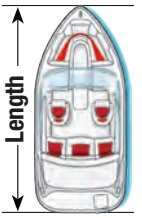
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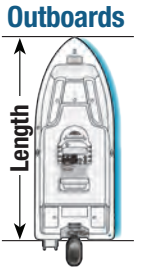
Before Going Out

Before going out on the water, take steps to make the outing safe and enjoyable.

Vessel Length Classes

- A vessel's length class determines the equipment necessary to comply with federal and state laws.
- Vessels are divided into length classes:
  - Less than 16 feet
  - 16 feet to less than 26 feet
  - 26 feet to less than 40 feet
  - 40 feet to less than 65 feet
- Length is measured from the tip of the bow in a straight line to the stern. This does not include outboard motors, brackets, rudders, bow attachments, or swim platforms and ladders that are not a molded part of the hull.





Vessel Capacity

- Always check the capacity plate, which is usually found near the operator's position or on the vessel's transom. This plate indicates the maximum weight capacity and maximum number of people that the vessel can carry safely.
- Personal watercraft (PWC) and some other vessels are not required to have a capacity plate. Always follow the recommended capacity in the owner's manual and on the manufacturer's warning decal.

Fueling a Vessel

Never fuel at night unless it is an emergency. If you must refuel after dark, use only electric lights. Try to refuel away from the water or on a commercial fueling ramp.

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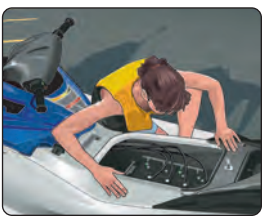
- **Before beginning to fuel:**
  - Dock the boat securely and ask all passengers to exit.
  - Do not allow anyone to smoke or strike a match.
  - Check all fuel lines, connections, and fuel vents.
  - Turn off anything that might cause a spark—engines, fans, or electrical equipment.
  - Shut off all fuel valves and extinguish all open flames, such as galley stoves and pilot lights.
  - Close all windows, ports, doors, and other openings to prevent fumes from entering the boat.
  - Remove portable fuel tanks and fill them on the dock.
- **While filling the fuel tank:**
  - Keep the nozzle of the fuel-pump hose in contact with the tank opening to prevent producing a static spark.
  - Avoid spilling fuel into the boat's bilge or the water.
  - Never fill a tank to the brim—leave room to expand.
  - Wipe up any spilled fuel.

The most important safe fueling practice…
If your vessel is equipped with a power ventilation system, turn it on for at least four minutes after fueling and before starting your engine to remove gas vapors in the bilge.

- **After fueling:**
  - Open all windows, ports, doors, and other openings.
  - Before starting the engine, sniff the bilge and engine compartment for fuel vapors.

Additional Safety Procedures for PWC

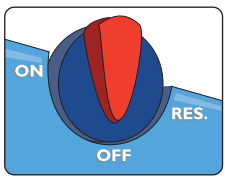
- Do not tip the PWC in order to fill it all the way up. If the tank is overfilled, the fuel may expand and spill into the water.
- After fueling, open the door of the engine compartment and sniff to check for any evidence of gas fumes. Do this before starting the engine. If you do smell gas fumes, determine the source and make repairs immediately.



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Fuel Selector Switch on a PWC

This switch can help you avoid becoming stranded without fuel.



- Use the "Off" position when the PWC's engine is turned off.
- Use the "On" position while you are underway.
- Use the "Reserve" position if you run out of fuel while underway. This will allow you to return to shore. Don't forget to switch back to "On" after refueling.

Preventing Theft

Defend against theft of your vessel and equipment.

- Store your vessel so that it is not easily accessed.
  - Store your vessel and trailer in a locked garage or storage area.
  - Park another vehicle in front of the trailer, or lock the trailer to a fixed object in a well-lit area.
  - Secure the vessel and trailer to a fixed object with a good-quality chain and lock. If moored, secure the vessel to the dock with a steel cable and lock.
  - Remove a trailer wheel if parked for an extended time.
  - Purchase a quality trailer hitch lock and use it.
- Chain and lock the motor and fuel tanks to the vessel.
- Mark or engrave all equipment with an identifier such as your driver's license number.
- Photograph or videotape the interior and exterior of your vessel, showing all installed equipment and additional gear and equipment. Make a complete inventory of your equipment, vessel, and trailer.
- Remove expensive electronics or other valuables if the vessel is left unattended.
- Cover your vessel and always remove the keys.
- Title and register your vessel.

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Filing a Float Plan

Before going out on a vessel, it is always a good idea to leave a float plan with a relative or friend, or at least with a local marina. A float plan should:

- Describe the vessel, including its registration number, length, make, horsepower, and engine type.
- State where you are going, the detailed route, your planned departure time, and your expected return time.
- Give the name, address, and telephone number of each person on board and an emergency contact.

Pre-Departure Checklist

You can help ensure a good time while operating your vessel by performing this pre-departure check.

- ✓ Check the weather forecast for the area and time frame during which you will be boating.
- ✓ Make sure that the steering and throttle controls operate properly and all lights are working properly.
- ✓ Check for any fuel leaks from the tank, fuel lines, and carburetor.
- ✓ Check the engine compartment for oil leaks.
- ✓ Check hose connections for leaks or cracks, and make sure hose clamps are tight.
- ✓ Drain all water from the engine compartment, and be sure the bilge plug is replaced and secure.
- ✓ Check to be sure you have a fully charged engine battery and fire extinguishers.
- ✓ If so equipped, make sure the engine cut-off switch (ECOS) and wrist lanyard are in good order.
- ✓ Make sure you have the required number of personal flotation devices (PFDs), and check that they are in good condition.
- ✓ Leave a float plan with a reliable friend or relative.

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On the Water

Safe navigation on Tennessee waterways is everyone's responsibility. All operators are equally responsible for taking action necessary to avoid collisions.

Encountering Other Vessels

Even though no vessel has the "right-of-way" over another vessel, there are some rules that every operator should follow when encountering other vessels. It is the responsibility of both operators to take the action needed to avoid a collision.

To prevent collisions, every operator should follow the three basic rules of navigation.

- Practice good seamanship.
- Keep a sharp lookout.
- Maintain a safe speed and distance.

Encountering Vessels With Limited Maneuverability

- When operating a power-driven vessel, you must give way to:
  - Any vessel not under command, such as an anchored or disabled vessel
  - Any vessel restricted in its ability to maneuver, such as a vessel towing another or laying cable, or one constrained by its draft, such as a large ship in a channel
  - A vessel engaged in commercial fishing
  - A sailboat under sail unless it is overtaking
- When operating a vessel under sail, you must give way to:
  - Any vessel not under command
  - Any vessel restricted in its ability to maneuver
  - A vessel engaged in commercial fishing

For the Tennessee regulation about encountering a law enforcement vessel, see "Enforcement."

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Navigation Rules

There are two terms that help explain these rules.

- **Stand-on vessel:** The vessel that should maintain its course and speed
- **Give-way vessel:** The vessel that must take early and substantial action to avoid collision by stopping, slowing down, or changing course

TWRA adopts the Inland Navigation Rules Act of 1980, 33 CFR Parts 83–90.



Meeting Head-On

Power vs. Power: Neither vessel is the stand-on vessel. Both vessels should keep to the starboard (right).

Power vs. Sail: The powerboat is the give-way vessel. The sailboat is the stand-on vessel.

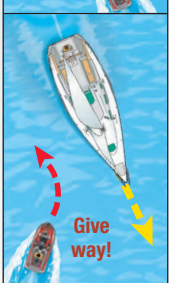




Crossing Situations

Power vs. Power: The vessel on the operator's port (left) side is the give-way vessel. The vessel on the operator's starboard (right) side is the stand-on vessel.

Power vs. Sail: The powerboat is the give-way vessel. The sailboat is the stand-on vessel.





Overtaking

Power vs. Power: The vessel that is overtaking another vessel is the give-way vessel. The vessel being overtaken is the stand-on vessel.

Power vs. Sail: The vessel that is overtaking another vessel is the give-way vessel. The vessel being overtaken is the stand-on vessel.

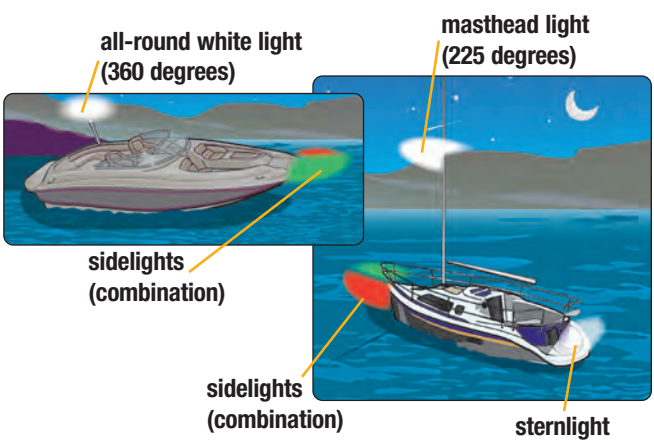


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Nighttime Navigation

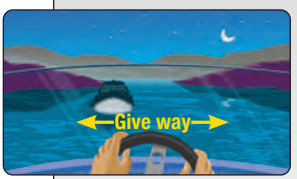
Be on the lookout for the lights of other vessels when boating at night. Several types of lights serve as navigational aids at night. There are four common navigation lights.

- **Sidelights:** These red and green lights are called sidelights (also called combination lights) because they are visible to another vessel approaching from the side or head-on. The red light indicates a vessel's port (left) side; the green indicates a vessel's starboard (right) side.
- **Sternlight:** This white light is seen from behind or nearly behind the vessel.
- **Masthead Light:** This white light shines forward and to both sides and is required on all power-driven vessels. A masthead light must be displayed by all vessels when under engine power. The absence of this light indicates a sailboat under sail.
- **All-Round White Light:** On power-driven vessels less than 39.4 feet in length, this light may be used to combine a masthead light and sternlight into a single white light that can be seen by other vessels from any direction. This light serves as an anchor light when sidelights are extinguished.

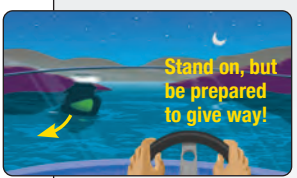


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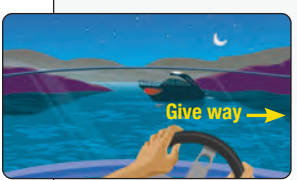
Encountering Vessels at Night



When you see only a white light, you are overtaking another vessel. It is the stand-on vessel whether it is underway or anchored. You may go around it on either side.



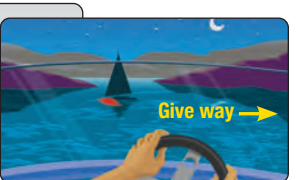
When you see a green and a white light, you are the stand-on vessel. However, remain alert in case the other vessel operator does not see you or does not know the navigation rules.

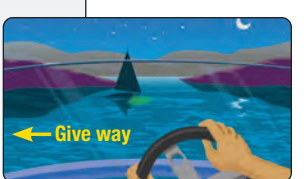


When you see a red and a white light, you must give way to the other vessel. Slow down and allow the vessel to pass, or you may turn to the right and pass behind the other vessel.

Encountering a Sailboat at Night

When you see **only a red light or only a green light**, you may be approaching a sailboat under sail and you must give way. The sailboat under sail is always the stand-on vessel.





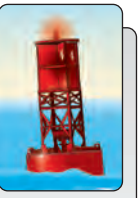
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U.S. Aids to Navigation System (ATON)

Buoys and markers are the "traffic signals" that guide vessel operators safely along some waterways. They also identify dangerous or controlled areas and give directions and information. As a recreational boat or PWC operator, you will need to know the lateral navigation markers and non-lateral markers of the U.S. Aids to Navigation System (ATON).

Lateral Markers

These navigation aids mark the edges of safe water areas; for example, directing travel within a channel. The markers use a combination of colors and numbers, which may appear on either buoys or permanently placed markers.



Red colors, red lights, and even numbers indicate the right side of the channel as a boater enters from the open sea or heads upstream.



Green colors, green lights, and odd numbers indicate the left side of the channel as a boater enters from the open sea or heads upstream.



Red and green colors and/or lights indicate the preferred (primary) channel. If green is on top, the preferred channel is to the right as a boater enters from the open sea or heads upstream; if red is on top, the preferred channel is to the left.

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Nuns are red cone-shaped buoys marked with even numbers.



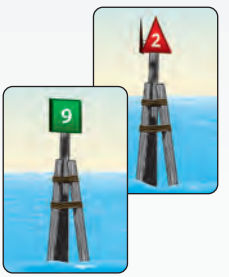


Cans are green cylindrical-shaped buoys marked with odd numbers.



Lighted Buoys use the lateral marker colors and numbers discussed above; in addition, they have a matching colored light.

Daymarks are permanently placed signs attached to structures, such as posts, in the water. Common daymarks are red triangles (equivalent to nuns) and green squares (equivalent to cans). They may be lighted also.







Red Right Returning

is a reminder of the correct course when returning from open waters or heading upstream.

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Western Rivers System



This system of markers is used on the Mississippi River and its tributaries above Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and on some other rivers that flow toward the Gulf of Mexico. The major difference from the ATON's lateral markers is that navigation markers on the Western Rivers System are not numbered. The numbers that are displayed below the daymark shape are not associated with the right or left side of the channel. On the Western Rivers System, these numbers indicate distance from a river mouth.

Non-Lateral Markers

Non-lateral markers are navigational aids that give information other than the edges of safe water areas. The most common are regulatory markers, shown on the next page, which are white and use orange markings and black lettering. These markers are found on lakes and rivers.

Mooring Buoy

Mooring buoys are white with a blue horizontal band and are found in marinas and other areas where vessels are allowed to anchor.



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Information

Squares indicate where to find food, supplies, repairs, etc. and give directions and other information.



Controlled

Circles indicate a controlled area such as speed limit, no fishing or anchoring, ski only or no skiing, or "slow, no wake."



Exclusion

Crossed diamonds indicate areas off limits to all vessels such as swimming areas, dams, and spillways.



Danger

Diamonds warn of dangers such as rocks, shoals, construction, dams, or stumps. Always proceed with caution.

Other Non-Lateral Markers

Safe Water Markers are white with red vertical stripes and mark mid-channels or fairways. They may be passed on either side.





Inland Waters Obstruction Markers are white with black vertical stripes and indicate an obstruction to navigation. You should not pass between these buoys and the nearest shore.

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Weather Emergencies

Weather can change very rapidly and create unexpected situations for boat operators. Even meteorologists have trouble predicting rapid weather changes. You should always monitor weather developments.

What to Do if Caught in Severe Weather

- **Prepare the boat to handle severe weather.**
  - Slow down, but keep enough power to maintain headway and steering.
  - Close all hatches, windows, and doors to reduce the chance of swamping.
  - Stow any unnecessary gear.
  - Turn on your boat's navigation lights. If there is fog, sound your fog horn.
  - Keep bilges free of water. Be prepared to remove water by bailing.
  - If there is lightning, disconnect all electrical equipment. Stay as clear of metal objects as possible.
- **Prepare your passengers for severe weather.**
  - Have everyone put on a U.S. Coast Guard (USCG)–approved personal flotation device (PFD). If passengers are already wearing their PFDs, make sure they are secured properly.
  - Have your passengers sit on the vessel floor close to the centerline for their safety and to make the boat more stable.
- **Decide whether to go to shore or ride out the storm.**
  - If possible, head for the nearest shore that is safe to approach. If already caught in a storm, it may be best to ride it out in open water rather than try to approach the shore in heavy wind and waves.
  - Head the bow into the waves at a 45-degree angle. PWC should head directly into the waves.

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- If the engine stops, drop a "sea anchor" on a line off the bow to keep the bow headed into the wind and reduce drifting while you ride out the storm. In an emergency, a bucket will work as a sea anchor.
- If the sea anchor is not sufficient, anchor using your conventional anchor to prevent your boat from drifting into dangerous areas.

VHF Frequencies Broadcasting NOAA Weather Reports

162.400 MHz **162.450 MHz** **162.500 MHz** **162.550 MHz**
162.425 MHz **162.475 MHz** **162.525 MHz**

These are the most commonly used VHF channels on United States waters.

Channel 6 Intership safety communications.

Channel 9 Communications between vessels (commercial and recreational), and ship to coast (calling channel in designated USCG Districts).

Channel 13 Navigational use by commercial, military, and recreational vessels at bridges, locks, and harbors.

Channel 16 Distress and safety calls to USCG and others, and to initiate calls to other vessels; often called the "hailing" channel. (Some regions use other channels as the hailing channel.) When hailing, contact the other vessel, quickly agree to another channel, and then switch to that channel to continue conversation.

Channel 22 Communications between the USCG and the maritime public, both recreational and commercial. Severe weather warnings, hazards to navigation, and other safety warnings are broadcast on this channel.

Channels 24–28 Public telephone calls (to marine operator).

Channels 68, 69, and 71 Recreational vessel radio channels and ship to coast.

Channel 70 Digital selective calling "alert channel."

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Other Boating Emergencies

A safe boater knows how to prevent and respond to other boating emergencies.

Falling Overboard

- **To prevent persons from falling overboard:**
  - Don't sit on the gunwale, bow, seat backs, motor cover, or any other area not designed for seating.
  - Don't sit on pedestal seats when underway at greater than idle speed.
  - Don't stand up in or lean out from the boat.
  - Don't move about the boat when underway.
- **If someone on your boat falls overboard:**
  - Reduce speed and toss the victim a throwable device.
  - Turn your boat around and slowly pull alongside the victim, approaching the victim from downwind or into the current, whichever is stronger.
  - Turn off the engine. Pull the victim on board over the stern, keeping the weight in the boat balanced.

Capsizing or Swamping

- **To reduce the risk of capsizing or swamping:**
  - Don't overload your boat. Balance the load.
  - Slow your boat appropriately when turning.
  - Secure the anchor line to the bow, never to the stern.
  - Don't boat in rough water or in bad weather.
- **If you capsize or swamp your boat, or if you have fallen overboard** and can't get back in:
  - Stay with the boat.
  - Try to reboard or climb onto it in order to get as much of your body out of the cold water as possible.
- **If the boat sinks or floats away,** don't panic.
  - If wearing a PFD, remain calm and await help.
  - If you aren't wearing a PFD, look around for one or for other buoyant items to use as a flotation device.
  - In cold water, float rather than tread.

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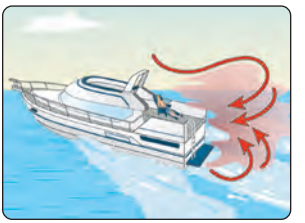
Hypothermia

- **If you are boating in cold water:**
  - Dress in several layers of clothing under your PFD or wear a wetsuit or drysuit.
  - Learn to recognize the symptoms of hypothermia. Symptoms begin with shivering and bluish lips and nails, and progress to a coma and, ultimately, death.
- **To reduce the effects of hypothermia:**
  - Put on a PFD if not wearing one. It helps you to float without excessive movement and insulates your body.
  - Get as much of your body out of the water as possible.
  - Don't take your clothes off unless necessary—clothes can help you float and provide insulation.
  - Don't thrash or move about. Excess motion consumes energy and increases loss of body heat.
  - Draw your knees to your chest and your arms to your sides, protecting the major areas of heat loss.
  - If others are in the water with you, huddle together with your arms around their shoulders.

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide is an invisible, odorless, tasteless gas that can be deadly. To prevent carbon monoxide poisoning, keep air flowing through the boat and take extreme caution when running a generator at a dock or at anchor.

- Whenever people are using a swim platform or are in the water close to the stern, turn off all gasoline-powered generators with transom exhaust ports.
- Swimmers should never enter the cavity between the swim platform and the stern of the boat.
- When boating, be careful running downwind as exhaust gases may blow back on board. On cabin cruisers, be aware that exhaust gases can blow back into the stern when traveling into the wind.



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Specifically for PWC

Although a PWC is considered an inboard vessel and comes under the same rules and requirements of any other vessel, there are specific considerations for the PWC operator.

Steering and Stopping a PWC



- PWC are propelled by drawing water into a pump and then forcing it out under pressure through a steering nozzle at the back of the unit. This "jet" of pressurized water is directed by the steering control—when the steering control is turned, the steering nozzle turns in the same direction. For example, if the steering control is turned right, the nozzle turns right and the jet of water pushes the back of the vessel to the left, which causes the PWC to turn right.

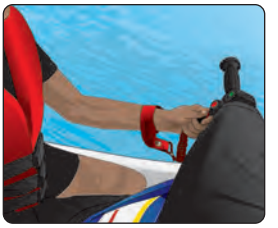
Remember—no power means no steering control…
Most PWC and other jet-drive vessels must have power in order to maintain control. If you allow the engine on a PWC or other jet-propelled vessel to return to idle or shut off during operation, you may lose all steering control. Many PWC will continue in the direction they were headed before the engine was shut off, no matter which way the steering control is turned. New PWC allow for off-throttle steering.

- **Most PWC do not have brakes.** Always allow plenty of room for stopping. Just because you release the throttle or shut off the engine does not mean you will stop immediately. Even PWC that have a braking system do not stop immediately.

Engine Cut-Off Switch (ECOS)

- Most PWC and powerboats come equipped by the manufacturer with an important device called an emergency engine cut-off switch (ECOS). If properly worn, this is a safety device that is designed to shut off the engine if the operator is thrown from the proper operating position. The USCG requires that operators of vessels equipped with an ECOS use the device at all times.

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- A lanyard is attached to the ECOS and to the operator's wrist or PFD. The ECOS shuts off the engine if the operator falls off the PWC or out of the powerboat. If your vessel does not come equipped with an ECOS, you should have one installed.
- In many states, it is illegal to ride your PWC without attaching the lanyard properly between the switch and yourself.

Remember…
Operators of recreational vessels less than 26 feet in length to use the ECOS if the vessel is equipped with such a device. Operators must use the ECOS whenever the vessel is operating on plane or above displacement speed.
Be sure to check with the state boating agency where you are boating to determine how this new USCG rule applies locally. For more information on this requirement, visit **www.uscgboating.org/recreational-boaters/engine-cut-off-switch-faq.php**.

Reboarding a Capsized PWC

After a fall, the PWC could be overturned completely. You should be familiar with the proper procedure to right the PWC and to reboard from the rear of the craft.



- Most manufacturers have placed a decal at the rear or bottom of the craft that indicates the direction to roll your PWC to return it to an upright position. If no decal exists, check your owner's manual or ask the dealer. If you roll it over the wrong way, you could damage your PWC.
- Practice reboarding with someone else around to make sure you can handle it alone. Don't ride your PWC if you are very tired because reboarding will be difficult. Also, avoid riding where there are strong currents or winds, which could hamper your reboarding efforts.

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Courtesy When Encountering Other Vessels

- Jumping the wake of a passing boat, or riding too close to another PWC or boat, creates risks and is restricted or even prohibited in some states. The vessel making the wake may block the PWC operator's view of oncoming traffic and also conceal the PWC operator from approaching vessels.
- Excessive noise from PWC often makes them unwelcome with other vessel operators and people on shore. Be a courteous PWC operator.
  - Vary your operating area, and do not keep repeating the same maneuver.
  - Avoid congregating with other PWC operators near shore, which increases annoying noise levels.
  - Avoid making excessive noise near residential and camping areas, particularly early in the morning.
  - Avoid maneuvers that cause the engine exhaust to lift out of the water because that increases noise levels.
  - Do not modify your engine exhaust system if it increases the noise. Improperly modified exhausts will not make your PWC faster and may raise the noise to an illegal level.

Environmental Considerations

When operating your PWC or other jet-propelled watercraft, consider the effect you may have on the environment.

- Make sure that the water you operate in is at least 30 inches deep. Riding in shallow water can cause bottom sediments or aquatic vegetation to be sucked into the pump, damaging your PWC and the environment.
- Avoid causing erosion by operating at slow speed and by not creating a wake when operating near shore or in narrow streams or rivers.
- Do not dock or beach your PWC in reeds and grasses. This could damage fragile environments.



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- Take extra care when fueling your PWC in or near the water. Oil and gasoline spills are very detrimental to the aquatic environment. Fuel on land if possible.
- Never use your PWC to disturb, chase, or harass wildlife.

Other PWC Considerations

- Remember that everyone on board a PWC must wear a PFD.
- Keep hands, feet, loose clothing, and hair away from the pump intake area. Before cleaning debris away from the pump intake, be sure to shut off the engine.
- Keep everyone clear of the steering nozzle unless the PWC is shut off. The water jet can cause severe injuries.
- Frequently inspect your PWC's electrical systems (e.g., starter and engine gauge connections) to ensure there is no potential for electrical spark. Gas fumes could collect in the engine compartment and an explosion could occur. After fueling, sniff the engine compartment for any evidence of gas fumes.
- Never exceed the manufacturer's recommended capacity for your PWC.
- Know your limits, and ride according to your abilities.



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Before Going Out

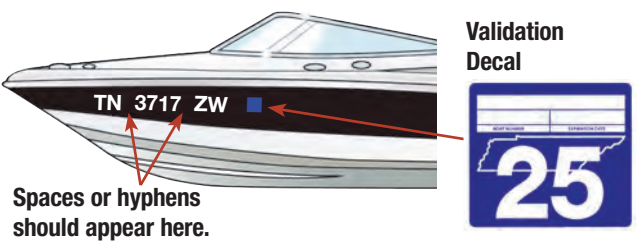
All operators are required to obey laws that regulate your vessel's registration and operation.

Registering Your Vessel

- You must have a Tennessee Certificate of Number (registration card) and validation decals to operate your vessel legally on public waters in Tennessee. The only exceptions are:
  - Vessels propelled only by paddles or oars
  - Vessels registered in other states and Tennessee has become the state of principal use and the vessel has been in Tennessee for sixty (60) days



- *The Certificate of Number must be carried on board and available for inspection by an enforcement officer whenever the vessel is operated.*
- The registration number and validation decals must be displayed as follows.
  - Number must be painted, applied as a decal, or otherwise affixed to both sides of the bow where no other number may be displayed.
  - Number must read from left to right on both sides of the bow.
  - Number must be in at least three-inch-high, plain, vertical **BLOCK** letters.
  - Number's color must contrast with its background.
  - Letters must be separated from the numbers by a space or hyphen: **TN 3717 ZW** or **TN-3717-ZW**.
  - Decals may be placed to the left or right of the registration number on both sides of the bow.



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- If your vessel requires registration, it is illegal to operate it or allow others to operate your vessel unless it is registered and numbered as described above.

Other Facts About Registration

- The Certificate of Number is valid for one, two, or three years, at the option of the owner.
- Vessel registration may be renewed in one of three ways:
  - Online at **www.GoOutdoorsTennessee.com**
  - By mail to Boat Registration, TWRA, P.O. Box 41729, Nashville, TN 37204-1729
  - In person at any business that sells Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) hunting and fishing licenses
- The owner of a numbered vessel can notify at **www.GoOutdoorsTennessee.com** within 15 days if:
  - They change their address.
  - The vessel is lost, stolen and/or recovered, destroyed, abandoned, or sold.
- If you lose or destroy your Certificate of Number or validation decals, you can apply for a duplicate online at **www.GoOutdoorsTennessee.com** or visit a license agent. The processing fee is $6.00.
- Larger recreational vessels owned by U.S. citizens may (at the option of the owner) be documented by the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG). Call the USCG at **1-800-799-8362** for more information.
  - Documented vessels must be registered in Tennessee and carry the Certificate of Number on board. They are not required to display the registration number.
  - The validation decals must be placed on both sides of the vessel on the windows closest to the main operator station. Sailboats may place the decals on both sides of the bottom of the main mast.

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Where to Register

Before registering your vessel for the first time, you must pay the sales tax to the dealer or at your county clerk's office. You then will receive an application that shows the sales tax has been paid. After completing the application, submit it to the TWRA. There are three ways to submit your application.

- Same day: Take the application directly to your closest TWRA regional office. The application processing time is one day.
- 14 days: Complete this application and upload it to **www.GoOutdoorsTennessee.com**. (Failure to upload a completed copy of this application will result in delaying approval.) The application processing time is 14 days.
- 45 days: Mail completed application to: TWRA, P.O. Box 41729, Nashville, TN 37204-1729. The application processing time is 45 days.

Vessel Registration Fees

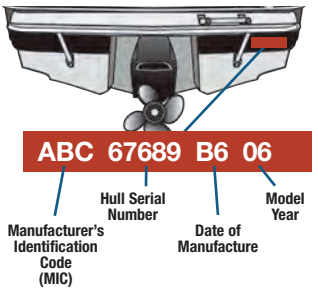
Length of Vessel	One-Year Registration	Two-Year Registration	Three-Year Registration
16 feet and under	$18	$34	$50
Over 16 feet to less than 26 feet	$35	$68	$101
26 feet to less than 40 feet	$54	$102	$153
40 feet or longer	$72	$138	$203

Hull Identification Number (HIN)

All vessels built after 1972 must have a 12-digit Hull Identification Number (HIN). All homemade boats built in Tennessee must apply for a new HIN by contacting the TWRA Headquarters, Boating and Law Enforcement. If applying for the registration and requesting that an HIN be assigned, submit a photo along with your registration application received from the clerk's office.

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If the vessel is already in your name, submit photos along with the TN number, your name, and telephone number to **HIN.Corrections@tn.gov**.



Who May Operate a Vessel

- **Those born after January 1, 1989:**
  - Tennessee residents must successfully complete the TWRA Boating Safety Exam and carry on board the Boating Safety Education Certificate issued by the TWRA when operating a vessel on Tennessee waters. Only the TWRA–issued certificate will be accepted as meeting the requirements of Tennessee law. This does not apply to non-residents.
  - Non-residents within this age category must show proof of successful completion of a National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA)–approved boating safety course.
  - Operators of vessels powered by engines of 8.5 horsepower (hp) or less and operators of sailboats under sail alone are not required to possess the Boating Safety Education Certificate.
- **To operate a motorized vessel of more than 8.5 hp:**
  - Those less than 12 years old must have a supervisor on board who is at least 18 years old and able to take immediate control of the vessel. The supervisor, if born after January 1, 1989, also must have a Boating Safety Education Certificate issued by TWRA.
  - Those 12 years old or older operating alone must have a Boating Safety Education Certificate issued by TWRA.
- **Those less than 16 years of age** may not *rent* a personal watercraft (PWC).

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Required Equipment

When preparing to go out on a vessel, the operator must check that the legally required equipment is on board.

Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs)

- All vessels must have at least one USCG–approved wearable (Type I, II, III, or V) personal flotation device (PFD), sometimes called life jacket, for each person on board.
- In addition to the above requirement, one USCG–approved throwable (Type IV) device must be on board and immediately available on vessels 16 feet or longer (except canoes and kayaks).
- Children 12 years of age and younger must *wear* a USCG–approved PFD at all times while on the open deck of a recreational vessel that is not anchored, moored, or aground.
- If a person chooses to wear a PFD that is not USCG approved (when not specifically required), a properly fitting USCG–approved PFD must be carried on board the vessel to meet the state and federal carriage requirements.
- A USCG–approved PFD must be worn by each person on board vessels being operated within specifically marked areas below dams.
- Each person on board a PWC must *wear* a USCG–approved PFD.
- Inflatable PFDs are not approved for PWC use, whitewater activities, or persons younger than 16 years of age.
- A ski belt may not be counted as one of the required PFDs on board your vessel. A ski belt may be worn while skiing, but an approved PFD for the skier must be on board the vessel.
- All PFDs must be in good and serviceable condition and must be readily accessible. Wearable PFDs must be of the proper size for the intended wearer. Sizing for PFDs is based on body weight and chest size.
- To be acceptable, all PFDs must be used in accordance with their USCG approval label.

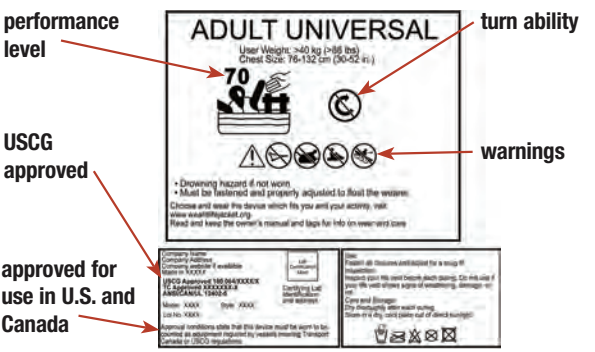
PFD Label

Every USCG–approved PFD has a label that contains important information. While boating, you may encounter old- or new-style PFD labels.

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Not all PFDs available are USCG approved. Regardless if the PFD label is in the old or new style, there must be a USCG approval number, and the PFD must be used in accordance with the labeling information to meet the legal requirements.

- The older legacy labels have a type number (Types I to V).
  - The type number indicates the conditions and the intended use for which the PFD is designed.
  - PFDs with these labels may still be used in the country where they are approved as long as they are in serviceable condition.
- The new labels have a performance level icon that contains a number, typically ranging from 50 to 150.
  - A lower number means the PFD is intended for near-shore activities in calm waters. PFDs designed for near-shore use offer greater mobility and comfort. However, they will not turn most unconscious persons face up.
  - A higher number means the PFD is intended for offshore activities. PFDs designed for offshore use offer greater flotation, turning ability, and stability.
  - PFDs with these labels are approved for use in both the U.S. and Canada.



Warnings

Some PFDs are **not** approved for certain activities:

- Water-skiing
- PWC or wakeboarding
- Tubing
- Whitewater paddling

Turn Ability

- The PFD will turn an unconscious person face up. Test before use.
- The PFD will not turn an unconscious person face up.

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Navigation Lights

The required navigation lights must be displayed between sunset and sunrise and during periods of restricted visibility.

Power-Driven Vessels When Underway

If less than 65.6 feet long, these vessels must exhibit the lights as shown in illustration 1. Remember, power-driven vessels include sailboats operating under engine power. The required lights are:

- Red and green sidelights visible from a distance of at least two miles away—or if less than 39.4 feet long, at least one mile away—on a dark, clear night.
- An all-round white light or both a masthead light and a sternlight. These lights must be visible from a distance of at least two miles away on a dark, clear night. The all-round white light (or the masthead light) must be at least 3.3 feet higher than the sidelights.

Unpowered Vessels When Underway

Unpowered vessels are sailboats or vessels that are paddled, poled, or rowed.

- **If less than 65.6 feet long**, these vessels must exhibit the lights as shown in illustration 2. The required lights are:
  - Red and green sidelights visible from at least two miles away—or if less than 39.4 feet long, at least one mile away.
  - A sternlight visible from at least two miles away.
- **If less than 23.0 feet long**, these vessels should:
  - If practical, exhibit the red and green sidelights.
  - If not practical:
    - Display an all-round white light ***or…***
    - Have ready at hand a white light as shown in illustration 3, which must be exhibited in sufficient time to prevent a collision.

All Vessels When Not Underway

All vessels are required to display a white light visible from all directions whenever they are moored or anchored outside a designated mooring area between sunset and sunrise.

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1. Power-Driven Vessels Less Than 65.6 Feet





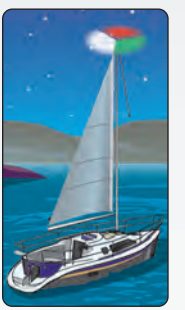


The masthead light and sternlight may be combined as an all-round white light on vessels less than 39.4 feet long.



2. Unpowered Vessels Less Than 65.6 Feet

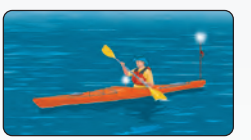




An alternative to the sidelights and sternlight is a combination red, green, and white light, which must be exhibited near the top of the mast.

3. Unpowered Vessels Less Than 23.0 Feet





Vessel operators should never leave shore without a flashlight. Even if you plan to return before dark, unforeseen developments might delay your return past nightfall.

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Fire Extinguishers

Any non-rechargeable (disposable) fire extinguisher that is older than 12 years should be removed from service. Refer to the date of manufacturing stamped on the bottle; for example, "05" means "2005."

- All vessels, including PWC, are required to have a Type B fire extinguisher on board if any of the following conditions exist.
  - Vessel is 26 feet or longer.
  - Vessel carries passengers for hire.
  - Vessel has closed compartments under thwarts or seats where portable fuel tanks may be stored.
  - Vessel has double bottoms not sealed to the hull or which are not filled completely with flotation material.
  - Vessel has closed living spaces.
  - Vessel has closed storage compartments where combustible or flammable materials may be stored.
  - Vessel has permanently installed fuel tanks.
- Approved types of fire extinguishers are identified by the following marking on the label—"Marine Type USCG Approved"—followed by the type and size symbols and the approval number.
- When required by the USCG, fire extinguishers must be on board the vessel and readily accessible—where they can be easily reached. When deciding on a place to store a fire extinguisher, make sure to consider how easy it is to reach in the event of a fire. It is recommended that the fire extinguisher be conspicuously and securely mounted on its intended hanger or bracket.

Vessels that have a **model year** of 2018 and newer may carry only 5-B or 20-B rated fire extinguishers with date stamp. Vessels with a model year between 1953 and 2017 may carry either:

- Unexpired 5-B or 20-B rated fire extinguishers ***or…***
- B-I or B-II rated fire extinguishers that are in good and serviceable condition.

Model Year means the period beginning June 1 of a year and ending on July 31 of the following year and being designated by the year in which it ends.

Use the chart on the following page to determine the size and quantity required for your vessel.

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Length of Vessel	Without Fixed System	With Fixed System*
Less than 26 ft.	one 5-B	none
26 ft. to less than 40 ft.	two 5-B (**or** one 20-B)	one 5-B
40 ft. to less than 65 ft.	three 5-B (**or** one 20-B and one 5-B)	two 5-B (**or** one 20-B)
*refers to a permanently installed fire extinguisher system		

Note: One 20-B portable fire extinguisher may be substituted for two 5-B portable fire extinguishers. For vessels with a model year between 1953 and 2017, one 20-B/B-II portable fire extinguisher may be substituted for two 5-B/B-I portable fire extinguishers.

- Extinguishers must not be expired or appear to have been previously used. They must be maintained in good and serviceable condition. Good and serviceable condition means that the fire extinguisher on board:
  - Is charged and indicates it is charged if the extinguisher has a pressure gauge reading or indicator ***and…***
  - Has a pin lock that is firmly in place ***and…***
  - Does not show visible signs of significant corrosion or damage ***and…***
  - Has a discharge nozzle that is clean and free of obstructions.

Ventilation Systems

The purpose of ventilation systems is to avoid explosions by removing flammable gases.

- All gasoline-powered vessels, constructed in a way that would entrap fumes, must have at least two ventilation ducts fitted with cowls to remove the fumes.
- If your vessel is equipped with a power ventilation system, turn it on for at least four minutes both after fueling and before starting your engine.
- If your vessel is not equipped with a power ventilation system (for example, a PWC), open the engine compartment and sniff for gasoline fumes before starting the engine.

Backfire Flame Arrestors

Because vessel engines may backfire, all powerboats (except outboards) that are fueled with gasoline must have a USCG–approved (comply with SAE J-1928 or UL 1111 standards) backfire flame arrestor on each carburetor.

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Mufflers and Noise Level Limits

Vessel operators may not hear sound signals or voices if the engine is not adequately muffled.

- The noise level of any motorized vessel must not exceed 86 decibels at a distance of 50 feet or more from the vessel.
- The use of cutouts is prohibited.
- It is illegal to modify the muffling system if it results in a noise level greater than the legal limit.

Requirements for Paddlecraft

The USCG classifies paddlecraft as vessels. All navigation rules apply to paddlecraft. Paddlecraft must have:

- A wearable PFD for each person on board
- A white navigation light ready at hand, which must be exhibited in sufficient time to prevent collision
- Visual distress signals when used on federally controlled waters (not required in Tennessee)

Sound-Producing Devices

Here are some sound signals that you should be familiar with.

- **Restricted Visibility**
  - ***One prolonged blast*** at intervals of not more than two minutes is the signal used by power-driven vessels when underway.
  - ***One prolonged blast plus two short blasts*** at intervals of not more than two minutes is the signal used by sailboats under sail.
- **Warning**
  - ***One prolonged blast*** is a warning signal (for example, used when coming around a bend or exiting a slip).
  - ***Five (or more) short, rapid blasts*** signal danger or signal that you do not understand or that you disagree with the other boater's intentions.

If on State Waters	
Less than 39.4 feet long (includes PWC)	Some means to make an efficient sound signal required
39.4 feet long or longer	Whistle **and** a bell required
If on Federally Controlled Waters	
Less than 39.4 feet long (includes PWC)	Some way of making an efficient sound signal, such as handheld air horn, athletic whistle, an installed horn, etc.
39.4 feet long or longer	Device that can make an efficient sound signal that is audible for one-half mile and lasts for 4 to 6 seconds

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Visual Distress Signals (VDSs)

- Visual distress signals (VDSs) are not required on vessels on Tennessee waters.
- Vessels on **federally controlled waters** must be equipped with VDSs that are USCG approved, in serviceable condition, and readily accessible.
  - All vessels, regardless of length or type, are required to carry night signals when operating between sunset and sunrise.
  - Most vessels must carry day signals also; exceptions to the requirement for day signals are:
    - Recreational vessels that are less than 16 feet in length
    - Non-motorized open sailboats that are less than 26 feet in length
    - Manually propelled vessels
- If pyrotechnic VDSs are used, they must be dated. Expired VDSs may be carried on board, but a minimum of three unexpired VDSs must be carried in the vessel.
- The following examples satisfy USCG requirements:
  - Three handheld red flares (day and night)
  - Three orange smoke signals (day only) and one electric light (night only)

Day

Handheld Orange Smoke (Pyrotechnic)
Floating Orange Smoke (Pyrotechnic)
Orange Flag (Non-Pyrotechnic)

Night

Electric Light (Non-Pyrotechnic)

Day and Night

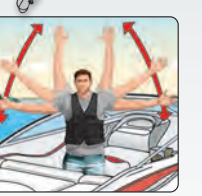
Red Meteor (Pyrotechnic)
Red Flare (Pyrotechnic)

Federally Controlled Waters

Vessels must observe federal requirements on these waters:

- Coastal waters
- The Great Lakes
- Territorial seas
- Waters that are two miles wide or wider and are connected directly to one of the above





Arm Signal
Although this signal does not meet VDS equipment requirements, wave your arms to summon help if you do not have other distress signals on board.

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Other Equipment

Diver-Down Flag

- Tennessee law requires that scuba divers and snorkelers display a diver-down flag to mark the diving area.
  - Scuba divers or snorkelers should not place a flag where it will obstruct traffic or create a hazard to navigation on a river, inlet, or navigation channel.
  - Vessel operators must not operate within 50 feet of a displayed diver-down flag and must reduce speed to idle speed when within 200 feet of the flag.
  - Divers and snorkelers must stay within 50 feet of their diver-down flag. After dusk, the flag must be illuminated so that it can be seen at a distance of 300 feet or more.
- Two types of flags are used to indicate diving activity.



Divers Flag

A rectangular red flag with a white diagonal stripe is used to mark the diving area and also must be displayed on vessels on state waters. When flown from a vessel, the flag must be at least 20 x 24 inches.



Alfa Flag

A blue-and-white International Code Flag A (or Alfa flag) must be displayed on vessels on state or federally controlled waters. The flag must be at least 3.3 feet (one meter) high and visible from all directions.

- Any vessel used in the diving operation must display from its mast both a divers flag and an Alfa flag visible from all directions. After dusk, these flags must be illuminated so that they can be seen at a distance of 300 feet or more.

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On the Water

Unlawful Operation

Tennessee law states that it is unlawful to operate a watercraft in a reckless, negligent, or dangerous manner. Violations are punishable by a fine of up to $2,500 and up to six months in jail. Specifically, the following operating practices are illegal.

- **Reckless Operation** of a vessel is any act that endangers the life, limb, or property of another person. Examples of illegal, reckless operation are:
  - Operating a vessel in a swimming area
  - Weaving your vessel through congested waterway traffic
  - Steering toward another object or person in the water and swerving at the last possible moment in order to avoid collision or spray others nearby
  - Jumping the wake of another vessel in a way that endangers another's life, safety, or property
  - Chasing, harassing, or disturbing wildlife with your vessel
- **Improper Speed or Distance** is not maintaining a proper speed and distance while operating a vessel. Examples are:
  - Operating at an excessive rate of speed in crowded or dangerous areas or during periods of restricted visibility
  - Operating a vessel at greater than **"slow, no wake speed"** in any areas marked as "No Wake"
  - Operating within 300 feet of a commercial vessel dock at greater than **"idle speed"**
  - Jumping the wake of another vessel within 100 feet of that vessel

"Slow, No Wake Speed" or "Idle Speed" means the slowest speed at which it is still possible to maintain steering. The vessel should not produce a wake at this speed.

- **Riding on the Bow, Gunwales, or Transom** is allowing passengers to ride on a vessel in places where there may be a chance of falling overboard while underway.

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- **Unsafe Condition** is operating a vessel in a condition that causes a hazard to the occupants or others on the waterways. For any of these problems, an enforcement officer may instruct the operator to immediately take corrective action or return to the nearest mooring.
  - There are insufficient PFDs, fire extinguishers, backfire flame arrestors, ventilation, or navigation lights.
  - The vessel is overloaded or overpowered.
  - Any other unsafe condition exists.

Paddlesports

Hazards can change from day to day and sometimes within hours due to weather and water conditions. Prepare for changing conditions. Check weather information and communicate with local people about what local hazards exist. Rainstorms can lead to rapid rises in river water levels, cause debris to accumulate, and create strong currents and large waves. Boaters should always be careful around any kind of debris or man-made structure. Debris or downed trees in the water can create an entrapment hazard, a leading cause of death among human-propelled boaters.

Low-head dams, often called drowning machines, can cause very strong currents above and below the dam and strong recirculating current at the downstream base of the structure. Once swept over the dam, a victim can become trapped and forced underwater, pushed away from the dam, then circulated to the top. This strong hydraulic motion makes it nearly impossible to escape. If trapped in a low-head dam situation, tuck your chin into your chest, draw your knees up, and wrap your arms around them. Conditions may push you out of and away from the hydraulic current, along the streambed. It is always best to portage around dams on any river or stream.

For river streamflow conditions in Tennessee, go to **waterwatch.usgs.gov/?m=real&r=tn**.
For additional skills training in paddlesports, visit the Tennessee Scenic Rivers Association at **paddletsra.org**.

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Boating Near Dams—Beware!

- Fishing and boating immediately above and below any dam may be dangerous and should be avoided.
  - Above the dam may pose fast moving water and current due to flood control or recent weather conditions.
  - Large volumes of water can be discharged within a matter of seconds through hydroelectric dams due to the demand for electricity or flood control.
  - Many upstream and downstream areas around dams are designated as restricted areas, and boaters should refrain from entering those areas.
  - Cold water released through tributary dams may be a hazard, even during the summer. Cold-water temperatures (below 77° Fahrenheit) can cause cold shock, short-term swim failure, or hypothermia.
- To protect yourself and your passengers:
  - Take special precautions when boating/fishing above and below a dam. Always wear and buckle a PFD, and leave the big motor in good mechanical order and running, even if drift fishing.
  - Never anchor your boat in the area below a dam, and never anchor your boat from the stern.
  - Immediately move to a safer area if a siren sounds or strobe lights flash. These are warnings that the water conditions are about to change drastically.

To check planned generation releases for TVA reservoirs, visit **www.tva.com/Environment/Lake-Levels**.
To check planned generation releases for Corps of Engineers reservoirs, visit **www.lrn-wc.usace.army.mil/preschedule.shtml**.

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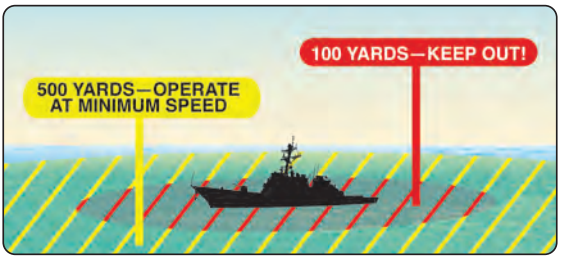
Obstructing Navigation

It is illegal to:

- Operate any vessel in such a way that it will interfere unnecessarily with the safe navigation of other vessels.
- Anchor a vessel in the traveled portion of a river or channel in a way that will prevent or interfere with any other vessel passing through the same area.
- Moor or attach a vessel to a buoy (other than a mooring buoy), beacon, light, or any other navigational aid placed on public waters by proper authorities.
- Move, displace, tamper with, damage, or destroy any navigational aid.
- Obstruct a pier, wharf, boat ramp, or access to any facility.

Homeland Security Restrictions

- Do not approach within 100 yards and slow to minimum speed within 500 yards of any U.S. Naval vessel. If you need to pass within 100 yards of a U.S. Naval vessel for safe passage, you must contact the vessel or the USCG escort vessel on VHF-FM channel 16.
- Observe and avoid all security zones. Avoid commercial port operation areas, especially those that involve military, cruise line, or petroleum facilities.
- Observe and avoid other restricted areas near dams, power plants, etc. Do not stop or anchor beneath bridges or in the channel.
- Keep a sharp eye out for anything out of the ordinary and report it to the closest authority.



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Alcohol and Drugs

- Tennessee law prohibits anyone from boating under the influence (BUI)—that is, operating any vessel propelled by a motor or sail while under the influence of alcohol or any combination of alcohol, a controlled substance, or drugs.
- Alcohol and drugs cause impaired balance, blurred vision, poor coordination, impaired judgment, and slower reaction times. Alcohol is a major contributor to boating accidents and fatalities.
- Tennessee law states that a person is presumed to be under the influence if the concentration of alcohol in his or her blood is 0.08% or greater.
- Tennessee law establishes the following penalties.
  - Those convicted of boating under the influence will be sentenced to serve at least 48 consecutive hours in a county jail or workhouse for first offense. If the blood alcohol concentration (BAC) is 0.20% or more on first offense, then a minimum of seven consecutive days shall be served. For a second offense, the sentence will be at least 45 consecutive days, and for a third offense, the sentence will be at least 120 consecutive days.
  - Those convicted a fourth or subsequent time will be sentenced as a felon and subject to punishment as such.
  - In addition, those convicted of BUI may lose operating privileges for one to ten years.
  - Federal penalties also may be imposed.
- By operating a vessel on Tennessee waters, you have consented to a sobriety test if requested by a law enforcement officer. Refusal to be tested is a separate offense and may result in loss of operating privileges for up to six months.



Just remember this simple rule:
Don't Drink and Boat!

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Marine Events

Permits from the TWRA are required for tournaments, regattas, races, parades, and exhibitions that may restrict waterway navigation or require additional patrol by wildlife officers. The free permit may be requested by applying to TWRA at least 30 days before the event.

TWRA Access Areas

These additional restrictions apply in TWRA Access Areas.

- Disorderly conduct and use of intoxicants or other behavior-modifying substances are prohibited.
- The use of firearms is prohibited except during regular hunting season. Target shooting is prohibited at all times.
- Swimming from or near boat ramps or in a way that interferes with the launching or removal of vessels is prohibited.

Boating Accidents

- An operator involved in a boating accident must:
  - Stop their vessel immediately at the scene of the accident ***and…***
  - Assist anyone injured in the accident, unless doing so would endanger his or her own vessel or passengers.
- Every vessel operator involved in a reportable accident must notify the TWRA *immediately*. The operator also must file a written accident report form with TWRA.
  - The accident report form must be filed within 48 hours if:
    - A person dies or disappears ***or…***
    - Someone is injured requiring medical treatment beyond first aid.
  - The accident report form must be filed within 10 days if damage exceeds $2,000.
- Failure to report a boating accident is a criminal offense and may result in prosecution by TWRA.

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Enforcement

The TWRA enforces and administers the provisions of the Tennessee Boating Safety Act.

- TWRA enforcement officers assist boaters as well as enforce laws and provide control when necessary.
- Every TWRA officer has the authority to stop and board any vessel. They may issue citations. When necessary, they may arrest, on sight and without warrant, any person they see violating a provision of the Boating Safety Act.
- The USCG has enforcement authority on federally controlled waters.

Encountering Law Enforcement Vessels

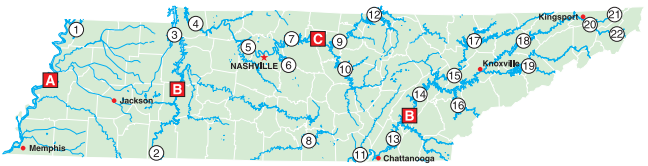
In Tennessee, if you encounter a law enforcement vessel displaying flashing blue lights, slow to "no wake speed" within 100 feet of that vessel.

Discharge of Waste

- If you have a recreational vessel with installed toilet facilities, it must have an operable marine sanitation device (MSD) on board.
- It is illegal to discharge raw (untreated) sewage into any public waters.
- Public waters are classified as either "discharge" (capable of accepting treated sewage) or "no discharge" (waste must be retained in a holding tank and properly discharged on shore).
  - Discharge into public waters is restricted to Type I or II MSDs and only on those waters classified as "discharge."
  - The discharge and no discharge reservoirs are listed toward the end of this handbook.
- All installed MSDs must be USCG certified.
- Marinas and docks operating on public waters must provide a sewage removal service.

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Tennessee's Reservoirs



A Mississippi River System

B Tennessee River System

C Cumberland River System

1. Reelfoot Lake
2. Pickwick Lake
3. Kentucky Lake
4. Lake Barkley
5. Cheatham Lake
6. J. Percy Priest Lake
7. Old Hickory Lake
8. Tims Ford Lake
9. Cordell Hull Lake
10. Center Hill Lake
11. Nickajack Lake
12. Dale Hollow Lake
13. Chickamauga Lake
14. Watts Bar Lake
15. Fort Loudoun Lake
16. Tellico Lake
17. Norris Lake
18. Cherokee Lake
19. Douglas Lake
20. Boone Lake
21. South Holston Lake
22. Watauga Lake

Discharge and No-Discharge Reservoirs

Discharge Reservoirs

Barkley
Caulderwood
Cheatham
Chickamauga
Cordell Hull
Cumberland River
Ft. Loudon
Kentucky
McKeller
Melton Hill
Mississippi River
Nickajack
Old Hickory
Pickwick
Reelfoot
South Holston
Tellico
Tennessee River
Watts Barr

No-Discharge Reservoirs

Beech River Lakes
Boone
Center Hill
Cherokee
Chilhowee
Dale Hollow
Douglas
Ft. Patrick Henry
Great Falls
J. Percy Priest
Lake Graham
Nolichucky
Normandy
Norris
Ocoee 1, 2, 3
Tims Ford
Watauga
Wilbur
Woods

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Discharge of Oil and Other Hazardous Substances

- You are not allowed to discharge oil or hazardous substances into the water.
- You are not allowed to dump oil into the bilge of the vessel without means for proper disposal.
- You must dispose of oil waste at an approved reception facility. On recreational vessels, a bucket or bailer is adequate for temporary storage prior to disposing of the oil waste at an approved facility.
- If boating on federally controlled waters and your vessel is 26 feet or longer, you must display a 5 x 8-inch placard made of durable material, fixed in a conspicuous place in the machinery spaces or at the bilge pump control station, stating the Federal Water Pollution Control Act's law.



If your vessel discharges oil or hazardous substances into the water:

- Immediately call the National Response Center at **1-800-424-8802**.
- Also call the TWRA.

Discharge of Trash

It is illegal to dump refuse, garbage, or plastics into any state or federally controlled waters. Many forms of litter can kill birds, fish, and marine mammals.

- You must store trash in a container while on board and place it in a proper receptacle after returning to shore.
- If boating on federally controlled waters and your vessel is 26 feet or longer, you must display a Garbage Disposal Placard that is at least 4 x 9 inches and notifies passengers and crew about discharge restrictions.

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Specifically for PWC

Tennessee law defines a personal watercraft (PWC) as "a mechanically propelled vessel that is designed to be operated by a person sitting, standing, or kneeling on the vessel rather than being operated in a conventional manner by a person sitting, standing, or kneeling inside the vessel." PWC operators must obey the laws that apply to other vessels as well as obey additional requirements that apply specifically to the operation of personal watercraft.

Requirements Specific to PWC

- *Everyone* on board a PWC ***must wear*** a U.S. Coast Guard (USCG)–approved personal flotation device (PFD), at all times. Inflatable PFDs are not approved for use on PWC.
- There are age and education requirements for operators of personal watercraft. See "Who May Operate a Vessel."
- PWC must be equipped with an engine cut-off switch (ECOS), and the operator must attach the lanyard of the switch to his or her wrist or PFD.
- PWC may be operated only during daylight hours (between sunrise and sunset).
- PWC must be operated in a safe and responsible manner. It is illegal to:
  - Jump the immediate wake (within 100 feet) of another vessel.
  - Weave your PWC through congested waterway traffic.
  - Steer toward another object or person in the water and swerve at the last possible moment in order to avoid collision or spray others nearby.
  - Operate the PWC close to boat ramps, docks, or the shoreline at more than idle speed.
  - Chase, harass, or disturb wildlife with your PWC.
- Persons who allow an underage operator to use a PWC may be prosecuted.

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Specifically for Skiing

Vessel operators towing a person(s) on water skis, a surfboard, or any other device have additional laws.

Requirements for Towing Skiers

- It is illegal for vessels to tow persons on water skis, a surfboard, or any other device between sunset and sunrise or during inclement weather.
- The towing vessel must be able to observe the towed person(s). The towing vessel must have either:
  - A person at least 12 years old, in addition to the boat operator, on board observing the towed person(s) ***or…***
  - The required number of wide-angle (170-degree field of vision) rearview mirror(s).
    - If the towing vessel is a personal watercraft (PWC), the PWC must be equipped with two wide-angle rearview mirrors.
    - If the towing vessel is a boat (other than a PWC), the boat must be equipped with at least one wide-angle rearview mirror.
- All persons being towed behind a vessel on water skis or any other device must *wear* an adequate and effective life preserver, buoyant vest, or life belt. If the device worn by the skier is not U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) approved, an approved wearable personal flotation device (PFD) must be on board the towing vessel.
- The operator of the towing vessel and the skier must not operate in a manner that endangers the safety of persons or property. A safe speed and distance from other vessels, persons in the water, docks, piers, and shorelines must be maintained.

Wakeboarding and Wakesurfing

It is unlawful to engage in wakeboarding or wakesurfing in the waters of Tennessee:

- Between sunset and sunrise
- On a body of water that is less than 50 acres in size
- On a portion of a body of water with a width of less than 400 feet when measured from the nearest shoreline to the second nearest shoreline

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- Within 200 feet of a shoreline, dock, pier, boathouse, or other structure located completely or partly on the water
- Without wearing a USCG–approved PFD

A person shall not engage in wakesurfing if using a motorboat that has a propulsion system that extends beyond the motorboat's boarding or swim platform.

Protecting Tennessee's Waterways



Aquatic Nuisance Species

Introducing non-native species into Tennessee waters can upset the balance of the ecosystem, harming the environment. Aquatic nuisance species, such as bighead and silver carp, Eurasian watermilfoil, hydrilla, New Zealand mudsnail, purple loosestrife, round goby, quagga mussel, and zebra mussel, are most often spread between waterways by hitching a ride on vessels and trailers. When transplanted into new waters, these organisms proliferate, displacing native species and damaging the water resource and your vessel.

To prevent spreading aquatic nuisance species:

- Inspect your vessel, motor, live wells, and trailer; and remove any aquatic nuisance species you see before leaving the area.
- Drain water from your boat, motor, bilge, live wells, and bait containers before leaving the area.
- Dispose of unwanted bait and other animals or aquatic plants in the trash.
- To remove or kill species that were not visible when leaving the area, either wash your boat and equipment with hot water or air-dry them for at least five days.

Outboard Emissions

New federal emission standards for marine engines are being phased in gradually. Many manufacturers are meeting these requirements now with clean-burning engines already available. The new technology provides easier starting, faster acceleration, quicker throttle response, improved fuel economy, and reduction of fumes and noise.

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Tennessee's Required Equipment Checklist



	PWC	Boat Less Than 16 Ft.	Boat 16 Ft. to Less Than 26 Ft.	Paddlecraft Including SUP
Certificate of Number on Board	✓	✓1	✓1	
Registration Number Displayed	✓	✓1	✓1	
Validation Decals Displayed	✓	✓1	✓1	
Wearable PFDs (Type I, II, III, or V)	✓2	✓3,4	✓3,4	✓3,4
Throwable Device (Type IV)			✓	
Type B Fire Extinguisher	✓	✓	✓	
Backfire Flame Arrestor	✓	✓5	✓5	
Ventilation System	✓	✓	✓	
Muffler	✓	✓	✓	
Sound Signaling Ability	✓	✓	✓	
Daytime VDSs			6	
Nighttime VDSs	7	6	6	
Navigation Lights	7	✓	✓	✓8

1. Not required for vessels propelled only by paddles or oars.
2. Each person on board a PWC must *wear* a USCG–approved wearable PFD at all times.
3. Children 12 years of age and younger must *wear* a USCG–approved PFD at all times while on the open deck of a recreational vessel that is not anchored, moored, or aground.
4. Each person on board vessels being operated within specifically marked areas below dams must *wear* a USCG–approved wearable PFD at all times.
5. Required on boats with inboard engines or stern drives.
6. Not required on Tennessee state waters.
7. Certain items do not apply to PWC because they are not allowed to operate between sunset and sunrise.
8. An electric light is required between sunset and sunrise and during times of restricted visibility.

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Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency



Central Office—Nashville
5107 Edmondson Pike, Nashville, TN 37211
Boating Safety 615-781-6538
Boat Registration 615-781-5270
TDD (Telecommunications Device for the Deaf) 615-781-6691

Region I
200 Lowell Thomas Drive, Jackson, TN 38301
West Tennessee 731-423-5725
Toll-Free (In-State) 1-800-372-3928

Region II
Ellington Agricultural Center,
P.O. Box 41489, Nashville, TN 37204
Middle Tennessee 615-781-6622
Toll-Free (In-State) 1-800-624-7406

Region III
464 Industrial Boulevard, Crossville, TN 38555
Cumberland Plateau 931-484-9571
Toll-Free (In-State) 1-833-402-4698

Region IV
3030 Wildlife Way, Morristown, TN 37814
East Tennessee 423-587-7037
Toll-Free (In-State) 1-800-332-0900

U.S. Coast Guard Marine Safety
229 Great Circle Road, Suite 148, Nashville, TN 37228
. 615-736-5421

For emergencies, contact your nearest TWRA office.
Local Sheriff's departments also can contact TWRA officers or call:
Tennessee Emergency Management Agency 615-741-0001
Toll-Free (In-State) 1-800-262-3300

www.tnwildlife.org

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