

Louisiana Boating Regulations and Required Equipment

HIN or HULL IDENTIFICATION NUMBER - A hull identification number is located on the starboard outside of a boat's transom as you look from behind the vessel. The HIN consists of 12 characters of letters and numbers. Boats built after November 1, 1972, must have this HIN number permanently attached to the hull before it is sold.

INSPECTION - All owners of homemade boats will be assigned a hull identification number by the Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries before the vessel can be registered [3].

NOTE - It is a violation of law to possess a boat or motor from which the hull identification number or serial number has been removed.

PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICE - **Louisiana law requires that all children 16 years of age and younger wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved PFD while underway on a vessel less than 26 feet long. The PFD must be fastened and of the proper size for the child.** (PFD Types [4])

HAND TILLER MOTORS

All persons on board a motorboat less than 16 feet which is being propelled by a hand tiller outboard motor are required to wear a USCG approved Type I, II, III or V PFD while the motorboat is underway.

A motorboat less than 26 feet with a hand tiller outboard motor in excess of 10 horsepower designed to have or having an engine cut-off switch must have the engine cut-off switch link attached to the operator, the operator's clothing, or the operator's PFD, if worn, while the motor is running and the vessel is underway.

CLASSIFICATION OF VESSELS

Class A----Less than 16 feet

Class 1----16 feet to less than 26 feet

Class 2----26 feet to less than 40 feet

Class 3----40 feet to less than 65 feet

REQUIREMENTS SPECIFIC TO PERSONAL WATERCRAFT (PWCS)

Each person riding on a PWC must wear a U.S. Coast Guard–approved Type I, II, III, or V personal flotation device (life jacket).

An operator of a PWC equipped with a lanyard-type ignition safety switch must attach the lanyard to his or her person, clothing, or PFD.

It is illegal for anyone under the age of 16 years to operate a PWC.

It is also unlawful for a person who owns or has charge of a personal watercraft to knowingly permit a person under the age of 16 years to operate the PWC. It is illegal for a rental company to rent a personal watercraft to anyone under 16 years of age.

It is illegal to operate a PWC between sunset and sunrise.

PWCs must be operated in a careful and responsible manner. For example, it is illegal for PWC operators to:

- Weave the PWC through congested waterway traffic.
- Jump the wake of another vessel when visibility is obstructed.
- Operate in a manner that requires swerving at the last possible moment to avoid collision.

It is illegal to chase, harass, or disturb wildlife with your PWC.

PWC operators should avoid operating around fishermen, anchored vessels, or swimmers.

Who May Operate a Vessel/PWC

Persons born after January 1, 1984, may not operate a motorboat or PWC powered by a motor in excess of 10 horsepower unless he or she has successfully completed a boating safety course approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA). The person may operate a motorboat if accompanied by someone over 18 years of age who if required has completed the course (this provision DOES NOT apply to PWCs).

- These persons must be in possession of evidence of completion of the approved course whenever operating such a vessel.

FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

All mechanically propelled vessels less than 26 feet must carry one B-1 U.S. Coast Guard approved fire extinguisher if any one or more of the following conditions exist:

- Inboard engines.
- Closed compartments and compartments under seats where portable fuel tanks may be stored.
- Double bottoms not sealed to the hull or which are not completely filled with flotation materials.
- Closed living spaces.
- Closed stowage compartments in which combustible or flammable materials are stored.
- Permanently installed fuel tanks. Fuel tanks secured so they cannot be moved in case of fire or other emergency are considered permanently installed. There

are no gallon capacity limits to determine if the tank is portable. If the weight of a fuel tank is such that persons on board cannot move it, the Coast Guard considers it permanently installed.

Mechanically propelled vessels 26 feet to less than 40 feet must carry two B-1 U.S. Coast Guard approved fire extinguishers. Vessels over 65 feet must comply with Federal Standards.

VISUAL DISTRESS SIGNALS (VDS):

All recreational boats, when used on coastal waters and the territorial seas, up to a point where a body of water is less than two miles wide must be equipped with visual distress signals. Boats owned in the United States operating on the high seas must be equipped with visual distress signals. The following are excepted from the requirements for day signals and only need carry night signals when operating at night:

- Recreational boats less than 16 feet in length.
- Boats participating in organized events such as races, regattas, or marine parades.
- Open sailboats less than 26 feet in length not equipped with propulsion machinery.
- Manually propelled boats.

Pyrotechnic visual distress signals must be Coast Guard approved, in serviceable condition and stowed to be readily accessible. They are marked with a date showing the serviceable life and this date must not have passed. Launchers produced before January 1, 1981, intended for use with approved signals are not required to be Coast Guard approved.

SOUND SIGNALING DEVICES:

Every motorboat or vessel of Class 1, 2, or 3, shall be provided with an efficient whistle or other sound-producing mechanical appliance. Every motorboat or vessel of Class 2 or 3 shall be provided with an efficient bell.

NAVIGATION LIGHTS:

Every motorboat or vessel when underway in all weather from sunset to sunrise shall carry and exhibit the following lights and during such time no other lights which may be mistaken for those prescribed shall be exhibited.

Every motorboat or vessel of Class A and 1 shall carry the following lights:

- A bright white light aft to show all around the horizon.
- A combined lantern in the fore part of the vessel and lower than the white aft showing green to starboard and red to port so fixed as to throw the light from right ahead to two points abaft the beam on their respective sides.

Every motorboat or vessel of Classes 2 and 3 shall carry the following lights:

- A bright white light in the fore part of the vessel as near the stern as practicable so

constructed as to show an unbroken light over an arc of the horizon of twenty points of the compass and so fixed as to throw the light ten points on each side of the vessel, namely from right ahead to two points abaft the beam on either side.

- A bright white light aft to show all around the horizon and higher than the white light forward.

On the starboard side, a green light so constructed as to show an unbroken light over an arc of the horizon of ten points of the compass and so fixed as to throw the light from right ahead to two points abaft the beam on the starboard side. On the port side, a red light so constructed as to show an unbroken light over an arc of the horizon of ten points of the compass so fixed as to throw the light from right ahead to two points abaft the beam on the port side. The side lights shall be fitted with inboard screens of sufficient height so set as to prevent these lights from being seen across the bow.

Motorboats and vessels of Classes A and 1 when propelled by sail alone shall carry the combined lanterns but not the white light aft prescribed by this Section. Motorboats and vessels of Classes 2 and 3 when so propelled shall carry the suitably screened colored side lights, but not the white light prescribed by this Section. Motorboats and vessels of all classes when underway shall carry ready at hand a lantern or flashlight showing a white light which shall be exhibited in sufficient time to avert collision.

ANCHOR LIGHTS:

All motorboats anchored in navigable waterways of this state shall exhibit a white three hundred and sixty degree stern light between the hours of sunset to sunrise. This light shall be the highest such light to be exhibited.

VISIBILITY OF LIGHTS:

White lights shall be of such character as to be visible at a distance of at least two miles. Every colored light shall be of such character as to be visible at a distance of at least one mile. "Visible" means visible on a dark night with clear atmosphere.

NOTE: When propelled by sail and machinery any motorboat shall carry the same lights required for a motorboat propelled by machinery only.

TRAWLING VESSELS:

A vessel engaged in trawling, by which is meant the dragging through the water of a dredge net or other apparatus used as a fishing appliance, shall exhibit two all-round lights in a vertical line, the upper being green and the lower white, or a shape consisting of two cones with their apexes together in a vertical line one above the other; a vessel of less than 20 meters (65.6 ft.) in length may instead of this shape exhibit a basket; a masthead light abaft of and higher than the all-round green light; a vessel of less than 50 meters (164.0 ft.) in length shall not be obliged to exhibit such a light but may do so; and when making way through the water, in addition to the lights prescribed in this paragraph, sidelights and a sternlight.

FISHING VESSELS:

A vessel engaged in fishing, other than trawling, shall exhibit two all-round lights in a vertical line, the upper being red and the lower white, or a shape consisting of two cones with apexes together in a vertical line one above the other; a vessel of less than 20 meters in length may instead of this shape exhibit a basket; when there is outlying gear extending more than 150 meters horizontally from the vessel, an all-round white light or a cone apex upward in the direction of the gear; and when making way through the water, in addition to the lights prescribed in this paragraph, sidelights and a sternlight.

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW:

CARELESS OPERATION OF A VESSEL:

Operation of any watercraft in a careless or heedless manner so as to be grossly indifferent to the person or property of other persons or at a rate of speed greater than will permit him in the exercise of reasonable care to bring the watercraft to a stop within the assured clear distance ahead shall be guilty of the crime of careless operation.

RECKLESS OPERATION OF A VESSEL:

Operation of any watercraft in such a manner so as to endanger the life or limb or damage the property of any person shall be guilty of the crime of reckless operation.

NEGLIGENT HOMICIDE:

Any person who by the operation of any watercraft at an immoderate rate of speed or in a careless, reckless, or negligent manner shall cause the death of another shall be guilty of the crime of negligent homicide.

INTERFERENCE WITH NAVIGATION:

No person shall operate any watercraft in a manner which shall unreasonably or unnecessarily interfere with other watercraft or with the free and proper navigation of the waterways of the state. Anchoring under bridges or in heavily traveled channels shall constitute such interference if unreasonable under the prevailing circumstances.

INTOXICATION:

No person shall operate any motorboat or vessel or manipulate any water ski, surfboard, or similar device while intoxicated or under the influence of any narcotic drug, barbiturate, or marijuana.

It shall be unlawful for the owner of any watercraft or any person having such in charge or in control to authorize or knowingly permit the same to be operated by any person who is intoxicated or under the influence of any narcotic drug, barbiturate, or marijuana.

INCAPACITY OF OPERATOR:

It shall be unlawful for the owner of any watercraft or any person having such in charge or in control to authorize or knowingly permit the same to be operated by any person

who by reason of physical or mental disability is incapable of operating such watercraft under the prevailing circumstances.

VESSEL COLLISIONS, BOAT ACCIDENTS, CASUALTIES, THEFT REPORTING:

An operator involved in a boating crash, collision or other casualty must stop his or her vessel immediately at the scene of the incident. The operator must also render assistance to injured persons or attempt to minimize any danger caused by the incident unless doing so would create serious danger to his own vessel, crew, and passengers.

The operator must give his or her name, address, and the identifying number of his or her vessel in writing to anyone injured from the incident and to the owner of any damaged property.

The operator of a vessel involved in a collision, crash, or other casualty involving a recreational vessel and resulting in death or injury to a person, disappearance of a person from a vessel, property damage in excess of five hundred dollars (\$500), or complete loss of a vessel must give notice of the incident immediately, by the most prompt means of communication, to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Law Enforcement Division (LDWF/LED), the nearest law enforcement agency, or to state police. **The number to report an incident to LDWF/LED is 1-800-442-2511.**

The driver of any vessel involved in a collision, crash, or other casualty as described previously must forward a department-approved incident report form to LDWF/LED, within five days after the incident.

Reports must be submitted to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Boating Safety & Waterway Enforcement, P.O. Box 98000, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70898-9000.

Reports in other cases must be submitted within 5 days.

STOLEN BOATS:

Every owner of a registered boat shall report its theft to the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries within five days of discovery of theft [5].

OVERLOADING:

No watercraft shall be loaded with passengers or cargo beyond its safe carrying capacity taking into consideration weather and other existing operating conditions.

OVERPOWERING:

No watercraft shall be equipped with any motor or other propulsion machinery beyond its safe power capacity taking into consideration the type and construction of such watercraft and other existing operating conditions.

RIDING ON DECKS AND GUNWALES:

No person operating a motor boat of twenty-six or less feet in length shall allow any person to ride or sit on either the starboard or port gunwales thereof or on the decking

over the bow of the vessel while underway unless such motorboat is provided with adequate guards or railing to prevent passengers from being lost overboard. This activity makes it easy to fall from a boat and leads to serious injuries and death in many cases.

RESTRICTED AREAS:

No person shall operate a watercraft within a water area which has been marked, in accordance with and as authorized by the laws of the state, by buoys or some other distinguishing device as a bathing, swimming, or otherwise restricted area.

WATER SKIING:

No motorboat which shall have in tow or shall be otherwise assisting a person on water-skis, surfboard, or similar contrivance shall be operated or propelled in or upon any waterway unless such motorboat shall be occupied by at least two competent persons; however motorboats used by representatives of duly constituted water-ski schools in the giving of instruction or to motorboats used in duly authorized water-ski tournaments, competitions, expositions, or trials therefore if applicable permit has been obtained from the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries or the United States Coast Guard. This does not apply to a motorboat being operated by a person sixteen years old or older, which is equipped with a wide-angle convex marine rearview mirror of a minimum size of seven inches by fourteen inches in a position to observe the skiers being towed.

MUFFLERS:

It shall be unlawful to use a motorboat unless the same is provided with an efficient muffler, underwater exhaust, or other modern device capable of adequately muffling the sound of the exhaust of the engine.

BACKFIRE FLAME ARRESTORS:

Every motorboat shall have the carburetor or carburetors of every engine therein, except outboard motors, using gasoline as fuel equipped with such efficient flame arrestor, backfire trap, or other similar device.

Gasoline engines installed after April 25, 1940, except outboard motors, must be equipped as stated in the above paragraph. The device must be suitably attached to the air intake with a flame tight connection and is required to be Coast Guard approved or comply with SAE J-1928 or UL 1111 standards and marked accordingly.

POSSESSION OF BOAT OR MOTOR WITH SERIAL NUMBER REMOVED:

No person shall possess an outboard motor or motorboat from which the manufacturer's identification plates bearing the serial number or hull identification number have been removed or altered.

An outboard motor or motorboat is considered contraband and shall be seized.

BOAT REGISTRATION:

All boats with motors, including electric trolling motors, operating on the waters of the

state, must be registered and numbered. Boat registration applications are available from most boat dealerships, and on the LDWF web site, from any of the Wildlife and Fisheries District Offices or from Wildlife and Fisheries, Boat Registration, P.O. Box 14796, Baton Rouge, LA 70898, phone number 225-765-2898.

After completing the application, mail it with your check or money order to the above address and allow 6 to 8 weeks for processing.

Upon receipt of your application and all other required documentation, the Department will issue you a certificate of registration, stating the number assigned to the boat, two decals, and an expiration date of three years from the date of issuance.

Your boat registration certificate must be on board the vessel at all times. Keep it in some type of waterproof container in a safe place where it can be readily found by the owner.

DISPLAY OF NUMBER AND DECALS:

The number assigned and no other shall be painted on or attached to each side of the forward half of the vessel's hull. The letters and numbers must be of a plain block design, not less than three inches high, and of a color that will contrast with the hull, light numbers on a dark hull or vice versa, and placed so that it is clearly visible and legible. The number and letters must be vertical and plain. Border, outline, or shadowing, must be disregarded in determining height or color contrast. Between the prefix, the numerals, and the suffix, there must be a hyphen or space equal to the width of a number, except 1 or letter, except I. Examples of correct number display are: LA-4002-CS OR LA 4002 GS.

PLACEMENT OF DECALS:

Decals received from the Department must be attached to each side of the vessel's bow within six inches of the numbers.

EXPIRATION and RENEWAL:

When your boat registration expires it must be renewed within sixty (60) days of the expiration date. The expiration date is printed on the face of the registration certificate. Renewal notices are mailed to the last known address 15 days prior to the month in which the expiration expires. Upon receipt of your renewal notice and applicable fees, your boat will be renewed for three years. Renewal can also be accomplished by submitting a Motorboat Registration Application with the renewal box marked along with appropriate fees. Applications are available online at www.wlf.louisiana.gov [6], or from dealerships and Wildlife and Fisheries district offices. If the certificate of registration expires, the numbers must be REINSTATED.

TRANSFER OF OWNERSHIP:

Certificates of registration that have not expired or have been cancelled can be transferred. When a boat changes hands, the original numbers issued to that boat are transferred to the new owner.

When a boat is sold, the Department must be notified within 15 days of the date of the sale. The Motorboat Registration Application can be used for this purpose.

Registration number, hull identification number, and proof of ownership must be included with an application for transfer of ownership. Proof of ownership may be the certificate of registration card with the reassignment of ownership on the reverse side completed and signed by the prior owner, or a notarized bill of sale.

DUPLICATE CERTIFICATES:

If a certificate of registration is lost or destroyed, the boat owner must notify the Department or in writing within 15 days, describing the circumstances of the loss. In addition, the owner must make application for a duplicate certificate.

CHANGE of ADDRESS:

The Department must be notified in writing of any change in the mailing address of the owner of a boat registered within the state, within 15 days of the change.

LOST, STOLEN, DESTROYED, OR ABANDONED BOATS:

When a registered boat is lost, stolen, destroyed, or abandoned, the owner must notify the Department within 15 days, file a LDWF Stolen Boat Report, so that the certificate of registration can be cancelled. In cases where a boat is lost or stolen, the owner shall also report the incident to local law enforcement authorities having jurisdiction, and request that the stolen boat information be entered into the crime information network. Report the boat's registration number, the owners name and mailing address and any distinctive boat markings.

BOAT OWNERS NOTE:

It is always a good idea to put some kind of marking on or in a boat the only the owner of the boat can identify. This type of mark identification will aid enforcement agents in identifying the boat specifically to the owner who divulges this private information on boats that have been altered in appearance.

TAX PAYMENT CERTIFICATION:

Before registration, all boats purchased from a boat dealer in Louisiana or a boat coming in from out of state must show proof that all state and local sales taxes have been paid. This may be shown on a bill of sale from a dealership or a Tax Certification Form completed and signed by the Department of Revenue and Taxation Officer and the local tax authority in your parish of residence. Tax certification is not required on a casual sale between individuals within Louisiana if the boat is already registered in Louisiana.

HULL IDENTIFICATION NUMBER (HIN):

A hull identification number is a 12-digit combination of letters and numbers located on the outside transom in quarter-inch minimum letters. All boats constructed after November 1, 1972, must have this number permanently displayed on the boat by the

manufacturer before the boat can be sold. (Boats manufactured prior to this date will have a metal tag serial number.)

All owners of homemade boats will be assigned a hull identification number by the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, along with a registration number, when they submit their registration application and complete the inspection process.

It is a violation of State and Federal law to possess any boat or motor from which the hull identification or serial number has been removed. Salvage or found boats, or boats with no identification markings must be reported immediately to the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Boats of this type will not be eligible for registration until a physical inspection has been performed by an Enforcement Agent of the Department.

MARINE SANITATION DEVICES:

All recreational boats with installed toilet facilities must have an operable marine sanitation device on board. All installed marine sanitation devices (MSD) must be Coast Guard certified.

Vessels 65 feet and under may use a type I-II or III MSD.

Vessels over 65 feet must install a type II or III MSD.

POLLUTION CONTROL:

It is a violation of the Federal Pollution Control Act to pump or discharge any kind of oil or oily waste that causes a film or discoloration on the surface of the water or causes a sludge or emulsion beneath the surface of the water into navigable waters. Persons found with oily waters in the bilges of their vessel must be able to show how they intend to dispose of it according to proper procedure.

Boats 26 feet or longer should display a 5" X 8" sign near the bilge pump control station stating the regulations of the Federal Pollution Control Act.

GARBAGE:

The Act to Prevent Pollution from Ships (MARPOL ANNEX V) places limitations on the discharge of garbage from vessels. It is illegal to dump plastic trash anywhere in the ocean or navigable waters of the United States. It is also illegal to discharge garbage in the navigable waters of the United States. The discharge of other types of garbage is permitted outside of specific distances offshore as determined by the nature of that garbage.

United States vessels of 26 feet or longer must display in a prominent location, a durable placard at least 4 by 9 inches notifying the crew and passengers of the discharge restrictions.

United States oceangoing vessels of 40 feet or longer, which are engaged in commerce or are equipped with a galley and berthing must have a written Waste Management Plan describing the procedures for collecting, processing, storing and discharging garbage, and designate the person who is in charge of carrying out the plan.

TERMINATION ORDER:

There are certain conditions under which a law enforcement agent may observe especially hazardous conditions aboard a vessel. The operator may be directed to take immediate steps to correct the condition, including returning to port.

Some examples where termination may be imposed are:

- Fuel in bilges.
- Fuel leakage.
- Insufficient number of USCG approved personal flotation devices.
- No or insufficient fire extinguishers.
- Improper navigation light display.
- Overloading beyond recommended safe loading capacity (Capacity Plate).
- Ventilation requirements for tank and engine spaces not met or up to standard.
- No or improper backfire flame arrestor.
- Manifestly unsafe voyage.
- Operating in regulated boating areas during permitted marine events.

Pirogues, Canoes and Kayaks Must have one Type I; II; or III PFD for each person on board, USCG approved and properly sized and in servicable condition.

Planning a route

Plan route as close to shore as can safely be navigated

Keep away from areas with fast currents

Stay within protected coastlines with surf under one foot

Study marine charts and have on board

Check weather conditions

Approaching fronts

Expected winds and rain storms

Wind velocity and direction

Fog possibilities

Tidal conditions

Rollover protection

Wear protective clothing

Expect to get wet

Wear a wet suit (hypothermia)

Have extra jacket or space blanket

Wear a life jacket proper size and fit

Learn and practice safety procedures

Learn and practice extrication and re-entry procedure

Slide belly onto vessel, then bend legs to enter vessel, stay balanced

Learn and practice assisted rescue

Practice in controlled conditions with other observers

Practice while wearing a PFD

Know and avoid hazards

Weather conditions, wind, squalls, lightning, waves, shallows, currents, tides, stumps, debris, other boat traffic, commercial boat traffic, vessel failures, medical conditions, wind temperature and water temperature, etc.

Learn and practice boating skills before taking trip, i.e. beaching in surf, avoiding obstacles in current, making safe harbor in lightning storms, righting vessel, vessel flotation, emergency calls, self rescue techniques, etc.

Planning route so emergency assistance can reach if needed

Group leadership, coordination, and spacing

Alcohol and drug control policy for trip

Several suggestions for making safe boating a reality:

Wear a life jacket. Most fatalities occur when someone falls overboard or the boat capsizes. Nine out of ten people who drown are not wearing life jackets. Don't mix alcohol and boating. More than 40% of fatal boating accidents involve alcohol use by the boat operator or passengers.

Follow navigation rules. Know where your danger zone is. Stay on the correct side of the waterway. Ski in a counter-clockwise direction and only in open areas with little or no boat traffic. Don't overload your boat with people or equipment. Leave a float plan with a friend or relative. Don't develop a lead foot on the throttle. Maintain a safe speed for the conditions that exist.

When driving a large vessel, slow down when passing smaller boats in narrow channels.

When operating a jet ski, stay away from larger boats and don't try jumping their wakes. A jet ski is a Class A motorboat and is bound by the same rules as other vessels on the water.

Check the weather forecast before you get underway. While boating check forecasts and observe current conditions and be aware of changing weather. Always use a handhold when moving about in or on any vessel. Never stand in or on a vessel that is underway.

It's cool to take a boating course to learn more about boating regulations, rules, and terminology. Find the courses at [Online Classes](#) or [Local Classes](#)

Marine Sanitation Devices for Boats and Houseboats

All recreational boats with installed toilet facilities must have an operable marine sanitation device (MSD) on board. Vessels 65 feet and under may use a Type I, II, or III MSD. Vessels over 65 feet must install a Type II or III MSD. All installed MSD's must be Coast Guard certified. Coast Guard certified devices are so labeled except for some holding tanks, which are certified by definition under the regulations.

When operating a vessel on a body of water where the discharge of treated or untreated sewage is prohibited the operator must secure the device in a manner which prevents any discharge. Some acceptable methods are: padlocking overboard discharge valves in the closed position, using non-releasable wire tie to hold overboard discharge valves in the closed position, closing overboard discharge valves and removing the handle,

locking the door, with padlock or keylock, to the space enclosing the toilets (for Type I and Type II only).