



safe boating hints for

personal watercraft



Gray Davis, Governor
State of California

Mary D. Nichols
Secretary for Resources

Raynor Tsuneyoshi, Director
Department of Boating & Waterways

Welcome Aboard!

Whether you own a personal watercraft (PWC), or you're just renting one for a few hours, you have just become a member of California's growing boating community. As a boater, you should know your vessel, know the law, and know some basic rules of boating safety and etiquette before you get out on the water. Your PWC is classified as a boat; therefore you must abide by the same operation and equipment laws as other boaters. Even if you are an "old hand" at boating, the California Department of Boating and Waterways wants you to have a safe and enjoyable time on the water and recommends that you read the information offered here. Please join the Department and other boaters in helping to make boating safer for everyone.

Personal Watercraft Defined: A personal watercraft is defined as a vessel 13 feet or less in length, propelled by machinery, that is designed to be operated by a person sitting, standing, or kneeling on the vessel. Its use is subject to all state, local and federal regulations governing the operation of powerboats of similar size. In addition, there are special laws solely for the operation of personal watercraft in California. These are discussed under "Reasonable and Prudent Operation."

Boating Safety Education

Familiarize yourself with your vessel before operating it on the water. Preparation should include these steps:

Read the owner's manual. If available, take advantage of the dealer's educational program on vessel operation.

Practice starting and stopping the engine safely.

Learn the local rules governing boating and the "rules of the road" before boarding your watercraft.

Free Boating Safety Classes, explaining required and recommended equipment for small boats and offering training in good seamanship, are offered throughout California by the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, the U.S. Power Squadrons and certain chapters of the American Red Cross. Boating and Waterways offers a free home study course, *California Boating Safety Course*. Study the booklet, fill in the answers on the exam card and send it to us. A passing grade will net you a certificate which may qualify you for a boat insurance discount. To order the course, or other free boating safety pamphlets, including *The ABCs of California Boating Law*, call (888) 362-2822, or e-mail us at pubinfo@dbw.ca.gov.

Age Requirements

16

It is an infraction for a person under 16 years of age to operate a motorboat of more than 15 horsepower. Any person who permits a person under the age of 16 to do so is also guilty of an infraction. A person 12 - 15 may operate a motorboat of more than 15 horsepower if supervised by a person on board who is at least 18 years of age.

Teaching New Operators

Teaching new operators is a serious responsibility. Before allowing anyone else to operate your PWC, be sure that he or she meets the age requirements under the law, is a good swimmer, and has been properly instructed in both boating safety and PWC operation.

Required and Recommended Equipment

Under California law, any person aboard a personal watercraft, or being towed behind a vessel, must wear a Type I, II, III or V Coast Guard-approved **LIFE JACKET**. Exceptions: This law does not apply to performers engaged in professional exhibitions, official regattas, marine parades, or tournaments. Note: Inflatables are not approved for use while water skiing or on personal watercraft. When planning even a short day on the water, check your life jackets for fit and serviceability. By law, you must also have a U.S. Coast Guard-approved **FIRE EXTINGUISHER** on board and readily accessible. Optional, but recommended, items include:

PROTECTIVE EYEWEAR

to protect against water spray, bugs and glare

GLOVES

for improved grip and comfort

WET SUIT

for protection against abrasion, sun, wind, and hypothermia; and additional flotation--highly recommended

BOOTIES, DECK OR TENNIS SHOES

with good traction to prevent loss of footing and to protect your feet from underwater hazards

**WEAR YOUR LIFE JACKET--
IT'S YOUR FRIEND FOR LIFE!**

Safety Tips

Along with the use of appropriate protective equipment, the use of common sense and courtesy will enhance your time on the water. Following are some tips:

- ▲ *Check your equipment, fuel level and weather conditions before you start.*
- ▲ *Let someone on shore know where you will be heading and when you will return.*
- ▲ *Watch for hazards, floating and submerged obstructions, tidal conditions, and observe local boating regulations.*
- ▲ *Go slowly near shore and drive defensively in congested areas, where collisions most frequently occur.*
- ▲ *Always look around for other traffic before beginning turns.*
- ▲ *Avoid sudden course changes near other boaters or swimmers.*
- ▲ *Never operate between a skier and the ski boat; a moving tow line can cut like a knife. The display of a red or orange flag by boaters indicates a skier or equipment in the water.*
- ▲ *Avoid overexposure to sun and cold water. Quit before fatigue sets in.*
- ▲ *Never venture out on the water during a storm; if a storm threatens, proceed to a safe location at once.*
- ▲ *Attempt to perform tricks only in controlled areas or in sparse traffic on adequately wide expanses of water.*
- ▲ *Seek your dealer's advice on the best method of disabling your PWC when stored or unattended to prevent children or other unauthorized persons from starting the engine. Don't leave your PWC up for grabs!*

Common Causes of Accidents

Operator Inattention: Unfortunately, some PWC operators have not familiarized themselves with safe boating rules, and have contributed to use conflicts and accidents on California waterways. Operator inattention is one of the main causes of boating accidents. PWCs are capable of quick acceleration and can operate at high rates of speed, with a high degree of maneuverability. Maintain a proper lookout by watching ahead and to the sides at all times. Accidents and near-accidents have caused nationwide concern for improved safety in PWC operation.

Alcohol and the Operator: In 2001, alcohol was a factor in 39% of all motorboat fatalities. A person with a blood alcohol concentration of .08% mayof 21, this limit is .01%. Alcohol impairs judgment, coordination, and

concentration. When combined with sun, wind and water, the effect of alcohol and other drugs is heightened. A person arrested for operating a PWC "under the influence" may be requested to take a test to determine blood alcohol concentration. Refusal may result in increased penalties, if convicted.

Rules of the Road – Right-of-Way

Meeting and Crossing Situations: When two vessels meet head-on, neither has the right-of-way. Both vessels should alter their courses to starboard (*right*) so that they will pass on the port (*left*) side of each other. In a crossing situation with another vessel, the vessel on the right has the right-of-way, as with cars at an intersection. If there is a vessel on your right, you must "give way" or yield. The vessel on your right should hold its course and speed until you are clear of one another.

Overtaking Situations: A vessel approaching another vessel from the stern (*from behind*) and overtaking it must keep out of the way of the overtaken vessel. The vessel being overtaken should hold its course and speed. In general, fishing vessels and vessels under sail have the right-of-way. Follow these basic rules of the road, except when a departure from them is necessary to avoid immediate danger.

Restrictions

Speed is limited by law. The maximum speed is 5 MPH for motorboats within 100 feet of a bather (*but not a waterskier*), and within 200 feet of a bathing beach, a swimming float, a diving platform or lifeline, a passenger landing being used, or a landing where boats are tied up. Local agencies may set speed limits in addition to those listed above. Restrictions such as special-use areas may be imposed by local authorities. It is your responsibility to check with authorities to become familiar with the regulations and ordinances particular to areas where you operate. For a list of waterways where PWC are banned or restricted, visit our Website: www.dbw.ca.gov and click on the [Two Strokes and MTBE](#) link.

Operating a PWC at night (from sunset to sunrise) is illegal even if the PWC is equipped with the proper navigational lights. In addition, the law requires a person operating a person operating a PWC equipped by the manufacturer with a lanyard-type engine cutoff switch to attach the lanyard to his or her person.

Noise Restrictions

Operators should reduce speed while heading out or returning to shore in order to reduce noise. Some personal watercraft owners have modified their exhaust systems, resulting in increased noise. Not only does this annoy fellow boaters, but the increased noise may keep the operator from hearing horn signals and sounds of impending danger, such as other fast-moving boats, distress signals, etc. Citations may be issued, with or without a sound test, for motorboat noise that exceeds the legal limits. In addition to increased noise and subsequent risk of fines, exhaust system modifications can lead to the voiding of the manufacturer's warranty and reduced engine performance. Please be considerate of others on the water.

Towing a Skier

To tow a skier behind your PWC legally, you must have an observer at least 12 years of age on board, in addition to the operator. You may not operate a PWC or tow a skier between sunset and sunrise. Each person on board, including the skier, must wear a Type I, II, III, or V Coast Guard-approved life jacket (for exceptions, see "Recommended and Required Equipment" in this pamphlet). The operator is responsible for making sure that the ski flag is displayed to indicate: a downed skier; a skier in the water preparing to ski; a ski line extended from the vessel; or a ski in the water around the PWC. Remember, a ski rope can cut like a knife; do not permit it to cross the path of another skier. Local ordinances may restrict the time of day or the area where skiing is allowed; check with your waterway operator.

Reasonable and Prudent Operation

California law states that no person shall operate any craft in a reckless or negligent manner so as to endanger the life, limb or property of any person. Some examples are:



- ⊘ *Navigating a vessel, skis, or other devices between a towing vessel and its tow or tows.*
- ⊘ *Operating under the influence of intoxicants or narcotics.*

The following actions constitute unsafe operation: Jumping or attempting to jump the wake of another vessel within 100 feet of that vessel; spraying down another person or vessel; operating at a rate of speed and proximity to another vessel so that either operator is required to swerve to avoid a collision.

Boating Accidents

Operators involved in a boating accident must give assistance to other persons involved; give their names, addresses, and boat registration information to any injured person or to the owner of any damaged property; and in the event a person dies or disappears, notify the nearest law enforcement agency having jurisdiction and the Dept. of Boating and Waterways, by the quickest means possible.

When to File a Written Accident Report: In the event of an accident, the owner or operator of a boat must file a *written* report with the Dept. of Boating and Waterways *when a person dies, disappears, or is injured requiring medical treatment beyond first aid, or when damage to a vessel or other property exceeds \$500.* Boating Accident Report forms may be obtained from the Dept. of Boating and Waterways.

Registration

If your PWC is principally used in California, it must be registered and numbered according to California law. Law enforcement agencies will recognize valid registration of another state, provided the vessel will not be used in California for longer than 90 days.

How to Register: Apply to register your PWC at any office of the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). Upon receipt of the required information and fees, DMV will issue you a Certificate of Number, a Certificate of Ownership, and a set of registration stickers. The registration number is the number beginning with "CF" shown on the certificates. The Certificate of Number must be available for inspection on the vessel when it is being used on the water.

Display of Numbers and Stickers: Proper display of the registration stickers next to the CF number is required to permit enforcement officers to determine, without stopping you, that your vessel is currently registered. Numbers and stickers must be affixed on each side of the forward half of the vessel, on a non-removable portion of the hull.

Help make California Boating Safe for Everyone!

Local agencies have restricted or banned the use of PWC's in some areas, so remember that the way you operate your boat may affect continued PWC access to your favorite waterway.

California Waterway Marker System

Markers



INDICATES DANGER

Nature of danger may be indicated by words inside the diamond



DANGER: BOATS KEEP OUT

Explanation may be placed outside the diamond



CONTROLLED AREA

Type of control is indicated within the circle



INFORMATIONAL SIGN

For displaying official information



ALPHA FLAG

Required for boats engaged in diving operations and restricted in maneuverability



DIVERS FLAG

Diver in immediate area



SKI FLAG

Ski, ski line, or skier in water



MOORING BUOY

Tie-up permissible

Sample Marker Usage



Dual Purpose
Marker on Land



Marker
on Piling



Marker on
Special Purpose Buoy

Channel Markers

When returning to marina or proceeding upstream



Left Side



Center



Right Side

For More Information

Department of Boating and Waterways
2000 Evergreen Street, Suite 100
Sacramento, CA 95815-3888
(888) 326-2822 e-mail: pubinfo@dbw.ca.gov
www.dbw.ca.gov