

## Your Motorboat's Registration

- Requirements for vessel registration vary from state to state. In Massachusetts, you must have a Massachusetts Certificate of Number (boat registration) to operate a motorboat legally on Massachusetts waters. Exceptions to registration are:
  - Vessels without any kind of motor (unpowered canoes, sailboats, or tenders)
  - Vessels properly registered in another state and using Massachusetts waters for 60 or fewer consecutive days
  - Vessels documented with the U.S. Coast Guard
- The Certificate of Number and validation decal are obtained by submitting the proper application form and fee to the Massachusetts Environmental Police.
- *The Certificate of Number (pocket-sized card) must be on board and available for inspection by an enforcement officer whenever the vessel is being operated.*
- The registration number and validation decal must be displayed as follows.
  - Number must be painted, applied as a decal, or otherwise affixed on the forward half of each side of the vessel and placed to be clearly visible.
  - Number must read from left to right on both sides of the vessel.
  - Number must be in at least three-inch-high, bold, **BLOCK** letters.
  - Number's color must contrast sharply with its background.
  - Letters must be separated from the numbers by two-inch spaces or hyphens: **MS 3717 ZW** or **MS-3717-ZW**.
  - No other numbers may be displayed on either side of the bow.
  - The validation decal should be placed in line with and within six inches following the registration number on the port (left) side of the vessel.
- 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 Registering and Tinting Your Motorboat

- A Certificate of Number is valid for two years from the date it is issued. Owners of vessels that have already been registered will be sent a renewal notice to their residence at least one month prior to the expiration of their current registration.
- All vessels 14 feet or greater in length that require registration also must be titled. The title application must be made to the Massachusetts Environmental Police within 20 days of purchasing a vessel. The title certificate is valid for the life of the vessel or until the vessel is sold or otherwise transferred, at which time the new owner must transfer the title.
- The Massachusetts Environmental Police must be notified within 15 days of any of these events:
  - The sale, trade, or transfer of ownership of a registered vessel
  - The abandonment, destruction, loss, or theft of a registered vessel
  - The change of address of the owner of a registered vessel
  - The destruction or loss of a Certificate of Number or validation decal
- Boat trailers are registered and titled under the same requirements as passenger cars. Application is made through the Registry of Motor Vehicles. Some smaller trailers need not be titled.
- Larger recreational vessels owned by U.S. citizens may (at the option of the owner) be documented by the U.S. Coast Guard. Call the USCG at **1-800-799-8362** for more information. Documented vessels are exempt from Massachusetts registration and titling requirements.



### Certificate of Number (Registration)

The Certificate of Number (pocket-sized card) must be carried on board whenever the vessel is operated.



Spaces or hyphens should appear here.

### Validation Decal

Displayed on the port (left) side only



PWCs also are required to display the registration number and validation decal. Note that the decal is displayed only on the port (left) side of a vessel.

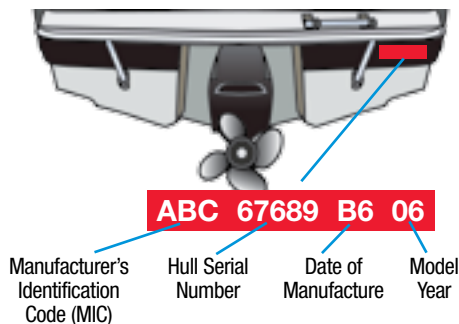


### Registration Questions?

Call the Registration and Titling Bureau at **617-626-1610** or visit [www.mass.gov/ole](http://www.mass.gov/ole).

You also may renew your registration online at [www.sport.state.ma.us](http://www.sport.state.ma.us).

## Hull Identification Number



Both the 12-digit and 17-digit HIN provide the information shown above. The 17-digit HIN also gives the length of the vessel, the hull material, the type of propulsion, the type of hull, and a "check digit."



## Boating Safety Certificate

Operators required to have a Boating Safety Certificate must carry it on board the vessel.

## Massachusetts Boating Law Reference

Massachusetts boating law is contained in Chapter 90B of MA General Law and in Section 323, Code of MA Regulations. Links to both can be found at: [www.mass.gov/ole](http://www.mass.gov/ole)



## Hull Identification Number

- The Hull Identification Number (HIN) is a unique, 12-digit or 17-digit number assigned by the manufacturer to vessels built after 1972.
- Hull Identification Numbers:
  - Distinguish one vessel from another—the same as serial numbers distinguish one car from another.
  - Are engraved in the fiberglass or on a metal plate permanently attached to the transom.
- You should write down your HIN and put it in a place separate from your vessel in case warranty problems arise or your vessel is stolen.
- It is illegal to remove or in any way falsify a Hull Identification Number.
- If your vessel is homemade, built before 1972, or does not have a proper HIN, contact the Massachusetts Environmental Police to inspect the vessel. The inspecting officer will affix a state-assigned Hull Identification Number to the vessel.
- A HIN is needed to title and register your vessel.

## Who May Operate a Vessel

- **Who May Operate a Motorboat:** The restrictions below apply to boats propelled by any type of motor, whether or not the motor is the principal source of propulsion.
  - **A person under 12 years of age** may operate a motorboat on Massachusetts waters *only if* accompanied on board and directly supervised by a competent person 18 years of age or older.
  - **A person 12 through 15 years of age** may operate a motorboat on Massachusetts waters *only if* he or she:
    - Has passed a state-approved boating education course *or* ...
    - Is accompanied on board and directly supervised by a competent person 18 years of age or older.
  - **A person 16 years of age or older** may operate a motorboat on Massachusetts waters without age restrictions.
- **Who May Operate a Personal Watercraft (PWC):**
  - **A person under 16 years of age** may not operate a PWC on Massachusetts waters under any circumstances.
  - **A person 16 or 17 years of age** may operate a PWC on Massachusetts waters *only if* he or she has passed a state-approved boating education course.
  - **A person 18 years of age or older** may operate a PWC on Massachusetts waters without age restrictions.
  - It is illegal to lease or rent a personal watercraft to any person under 16 years of age. It is illegal to lease or rent a PWC to any person 16 or 17 years of age who does not have in his or her possession the required Boating Safety Certificate.
- A person must be at least 12 years of age to be issued a Boating Safety Certificate. Students must be at least 12 years of age to enroll in the state's boating safety course.
- A person required to have passed a state-approved boating education course must have the Boating Safety Certificate on board and available for inspection by an enforcement officer whenever the vessel is operated.

## Unlawful Operation of a Vessel

Massachusetts law designates the following dangerous operating practices as illegal.

- **Reckless or Negligent Operation** of a vessel is the failure to exercise the degree of care necessary to prevent endangering the life, limb, or property of any person. Examples of reckless or negligent operation are:
  - Operating at high speed or erratically in congested waterway traffic
  - Operating such that your vessel or another vessel must swerve abruptly or cut speed in order to avoid collision
  - Operating near or through areas being used by swimmers or divers
  - Operating such that your vessel collides with another vessel, object, or person
  - Operating under the influence of alcohol or drugs
  - Cutting through a regatta or marine parade in progress
  - Operating between sunset and sunrise without displaying navigation lights
  - Chasing or harassing wildlife with your vessel
- **Improper Speed or Distance** is not maintaining a proper speed and/or distance while operating a vessel. Specifically, it is illegal to operate any vessel:
  - At a distance from other vessels or at a speed that exceeds safe and reasonable limits given the waterway traffic; marked speed limits; visibility; wind, water, and current conditions; and the proximity of navigational hazards
  - At greater than 45 miles per hour on any inland waters of Massachusetts, except on areas posted otherwise
  - At any speed within the following swimming areas:
    - 150 feet of shorelines used as swimming areas
    - 75 feet of floats or markers that designate swimming areas
  - At a rate of speed that creates a wake that causes damage, injury, or excessive rocking to other vessels, rafts, or floats
  - At more than **headway speed** under any of the following conditions:
    - Within 150 to 300 feet of shorelines used as swimming areas
    - Within 150 feet of marinas, ramps, rafts, or floats
    - Within 150 feet of swimmers
    - When vision is obscured by bridges, bends in the waterway, or any other reason
    - When operating in a channel, unless channel markers state that higher speeds are allowed
- **Failure To Follow Navigation Rules** is operating a vessel on Massachusetts waters in violation of the navigation rules.
- **Riding on the Bow or Gunwales** is allowing passengers to ride on the bow, **gunwales**, or any other place where there may be a chance of falling **overboard**.
- **Overloading or Overpowering** is loading or powering the vessel beyond the safe load and power limits, taking into consideration weather and other operating conditions. The safe load and power limits for most vessels are shown on the capacity plate installed by the vessel manufacturer (see Chapter 2).
- **Unsafe Condition** is operating a vessel in a condition that causes danger to the occupants or others on the waterways. Law enforcement officers may instruct the operator to take immediate corrective action or terminate the voyage if any of the following “unsafe conditions” exist:
  - Inadequate number of life jackets or fire extinguishers
  - Overloading (check capacity plate information)
  - Failure to display navigation lights after sunset
  - Fuel leakage or excessive fuel accumulation in the bilges or the engine compartment
  - Lack of proper ventilation of engine spaces
  - Failure to meet carburetor backfire flame arrestor requirements
  - Excessive leakage or accumulation of water in the bilge

## Remember...

As an owner of a vessel, you are responsible if you allow others to operate your vessel in an illegal manner or without the required equipment.

### headway speed

The minimum speed at which a vessel may be operated and still maintain steering, but not to exceed 6 miles per hour

### gunwale

Upper edge of vessel's side (generally pronounced “gunnel”)

### overboard

Over the side or out of the vessel

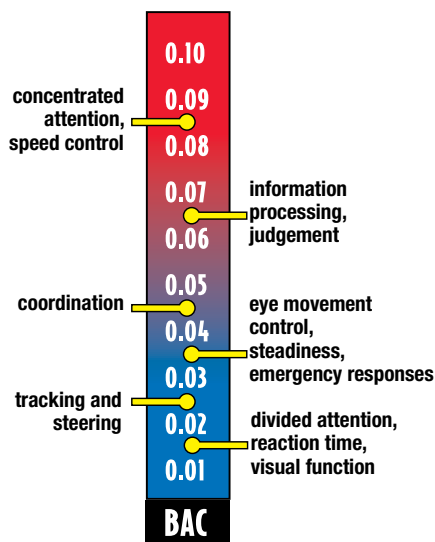
The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and U.S. Power Squadrons will perform a Vessel Safety Check (VSC) of your vessel and equipment free of charge. This inspection covers federal and state requirements. If your vessel meets all VSC requirements, you will receive a VSC decal. If your vessel fails to meet all requirements, no report is made to any law enforcement agency.





The best thing you can do for your safety and the safety of your passengers and other boaters is simple ... *Don't Drink and Boat!*

### Areas of Impairment Due to Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC)



Because you can drink faster than your system can burn off the alcohol, there is an increasing level of alcohol in your blood. This level is referred to as Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC).

#### moor

To keep a vessel in place by setting anchor or tying the vessel to a fixed object or buoy



## Alcohol and Drugs

Massachusetts has one of the strongest boating under the influence (BUI) laws in the nation. Massachusetts law prohibits anyone from operating any vessel while under the influence of alcohol or any controlled substance.

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. Read more about the effects and risks of consuming alcohol in Chapter 5.

- Massachusetts law states that a person is considered to be boating under the influence (BUI) if he or she has a blood or breath alcohol concentration of 0.08% or greater.
- Massachusetts law establishes the following penalties for BUI.
  - Those convicted of BUI for the first time may be imprisoned for up to 30 months, fined up to \$1,000, or imprisoned and fined. An offender also may have his or her motor vehicle license and vessel's registration revoked for up to one year.
  - Repeat offenders will receive more severe penalties.
  - Offenders convicted of BUI and causing serious bodily injury to another person may be imprisoned for up to 10 years and fined up to \$5,000.
- By operating a vessel on Massachusetts waters, you have given "implied" consent to alcohol testing if arrested for boating under the influence. Anyone who refuses to submit to a blood alcohol level test is subject to having their motor vehicle license and vessel's registration revoked for 180 days.
- It is illegal for the owner or operator of a vessel to knowingly permit it to be operated by someone under the influence of alcohol or any controlled substance.

## Obstructing Navigation

Vessel operators should always be considerate of other vessel operators even when stopping to anchor or **moor**. Keep in mind that it is illegal to:

- Operate any vessel in such a way that it will interfere unnecessarily with the safe navigation of other vessels on the waterway.
- 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

Recreational boaters have a role in keeping our waterways safe and secure.

- Violators of the restrictions below can expect a quick and severe response.
  - 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 U.S. Naval vessel or the U.S. Coast Guard 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 that looks peculiar or out of the ordinary. Report all activities that seem suspicious to the local authorities, the U.S. Coast Guard, or the port or marina security.

## Personal Flotation Devices (Life Jackets)

All vessels must be equipped with U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jackets, called personal flotation devices (PFDs). The quantity and type depend on the length of your vessel and the number of people on board and/or being towed. Each PFD must be in good condition, be the proper size for the intended wearer, and very importantly, be readily accessible! Readily accessible means you must be able to put the PFD on in a reasonable amount of time in an emergency (vessel sinking, on fire, etc.). PFDs should not be stowed in plastic bags or in locked or closed compartments, and they should not have other gear stowed on top of them.

Vessel operators should ask everyone on their vessel to wear a PFD whenever on the water. ***PFDs can save lives, but only if they are worn!***

### PFD Requirements

- All vessels must have at least one USCG–approved Type I, II, III, or V PFD (life jacket) for each person on board.
- In addition to the requirement for life jackets, one USCG–approved Type IV (throwable) PFD must be on board vessels 16 feet or longer.
- Children under 12 years of age must *wear* a USCG–approved Type I, II, III, or V PFD whenever above deck on any vessel that is underway.
- All persons on board a personal watercraft (PWC) must *wear* a USCG–approved Type I, II, III, or V PFD at all times.
- All persons water-skiing or being towed in any manner must *wear* a USCG–approved Type I, II, or III PFD at all times.
- All persons on board a canoe or kayak from September 15 to May 15 must *wear* a USCG–approved Type I, II, or III PFD at all times.
- All PFDs must be in good and serviceable condition, legibly marked with the USCG approval number, and 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.

### PFD Descriptions

#### TYPE I: Offshore Life Jackets

These vests are geared for rough or remote waters where rescue may take awhile. They provide the most buoyancy, are excellent for flotation, and will turn most unconscious persons face up in the water.

#### TYPE II: Near-Shore Vests

These vests are good for calm waters when quick assistance or rescue is likely. Type II vests will turn some unconscious wearers face up in the water, but the turning is not as pronounced as with a Type I.

#### TYPE III: Flotation Aids

These vests or full-sleeved jackets are good for calm waters when quick assistance or rescue is likely. They are not recommended for rough waters since they will not turn most unconscious persons face up. Type III PFDs are used for water sports such as water-skiing. Some Type III PFDs are designed to inflate when you enter the water.

#### TYPE IV: Throwable Devices/Not Wearable

These cushions and ring buoys are designed to be thrown to someone in trouble. Since a Type IV PFD is not designed to be worn, it is neither for rough waters nor for persons who are unable to hold onto it.

#### TYPE V: Special-Use Devices

These vests, deck suits, hybrid PFDs, and others are designed for specific activities such as windsurfing, kayaking, or water-skiing. Some Type V PFDs are designed to inflate when you enter the water. *To be acceptable, Type V PFDs must be used in accordance with their label.*

### Boater's Tip

An emergency situation (rough water, rapid onset of bad weather, or dangerous boating traffic) can occur suddenly—leaving little or no time to put on life jackets. Life jackets are very difficult to put on once you are in the water. Be a smart boater, and have everyone on board your vessel wear their life jackets at all times.



### Types of Personal Flotation Devices

Read and follow the label restrictions on all PFDs.



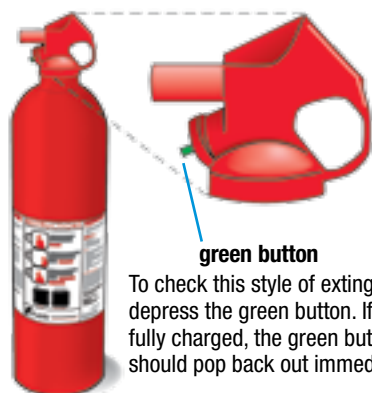
### Boater's Tip



PWC operators need to take special steps in case of fire. Because their fire extinguishers may not be easily accessible, they should simply swim away quickly and use another operator's extinguisher. They should not open the engine compartment to put out the fire.

### Fire Extinguisher Charge Indicators

Check the charge level of your fire extinguishers regularly. Replace them immediately if they are not fully charged.



To check this style of extinguisher, depress the green button. If it is fully charged, the green button should pop back out immediately.



On this style of fire extinguisher, the needle indicator should be in the "full" range.

### Remember ...

Keep bilges clean and free of trash in order to reduce the risk of fire.

## Fire Extinguishers

- Extinguishers are classified by a letter and number symbol. The number indicates the relative size of the extinguisher. For example, a B-II extinguisher has twice as much extinguishing agent as a B-I extinguisher. The letter indicates the type of fire it will extinguish.
  - **Type A** fires are of combustible solids like wood.
  - **Type B** fires are of flammable liquids like gasoline or oil.
  - **Type C** fires are electrical fires.
- All vessels with a motor of any type are required to have a Type B fire extinguisher(s) on board. The only exception is a vessel that is of open construction, is less than 26 feet in length, has an outboard engine, and is not carrying passengers for hire, and is not on federally controlled waters (see page 33).
- 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.

Use this chart to determine the type and quantity of fire extinguisher(s) required for your motorized vessel.

Length of Vessel	Without Fixed System	With Fixed System*
Less than 16 feet	None**	None
16 feet to less than 26 feet	one B-I***	None
26 feet to less than 40 feet	two B-I or one B-II	one B-I
40 feet to less than 65 feet	three B-I or one B-II and one B-I	two B-I or one B-II

\* Refers to a permanently installed fire extinguisher system.  
 \*\* One B-I extinguisher is required if boating on federally controlled waters.  
 \*\*\* Not required if a vessel is of open construction, is less than 26 feet in length, has an outboard engine, is not carrying passengers for hire, and is not on federally controlled waters. One B-I extinguisher is required if on federally controlled waters.

- Extinguishers should be placed in an accessible area—not near the engine or in a compartment, but where they can be reached immediately. Be sure you know how to operate them.
- Fire extinguishers must be maintained in usable condition. Inspect extinguishers regularly to ensure the following.
  - Seals and tamper indicators are not broken or missing.
  - Pressure gauges or indicators read in the operable range.
  - There is no physical damage, corrosion, leakage, or clogged nozzles.

## Backfire Flame Arrestors

Because boat engines may **backfire**, all powerboats (except outboards) that are fueled with gasoline must have an approved backfire flame arrestor on each carburetor. Backfire flame arrestors are designed to prevent the ignition of gasoline vapors in case the engine backfires.

- Backfire flame arrestors must be:
  - In good and serviceable condition
  - U.S. Coast Guard–approved (must comply with SAE J-1928 or UL 1111 standards)
- Periodically clean the flame arrestor(s) and check for any damage.

## Ventilation Systems

Ventilation systems are crucial. Their purpose is to avoid explosions by removing flammable gases. Properly installed ventilation systems greatly reduce the chance of a life-threatening explosion.

- 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. At least one exhaust duct must extend from the open atmosphere to the lower bilge. At least one intake duct must extend from a point at least midway to the bilge or below the level of the carburetor air intake.
- If your vessel is equipped with a power ventilation system, turn it on for at least four minutes in either of these situations:
  - After fueling
  - Before starting the engine
- If your vessel is not equipped with a power ventilation system (for example, a personal watercraft), open the engine compartment and sniff for gasoline fumes before starting the engine.

## Mufflers and Noise Level Limits

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

- The exhaust of every internal combustion engine on any vessel must be effectively muffled by a muffler or underwater exhaust. That is, the engine's exhaust must be muffled or suppressed at all times so as not to create excessive noise.
- The use of cutouts is prohibited.
- It is illegal to remove or modify the exhaust or muffler system of a vessel.
- Vessels involved in a marine event authorized by the Massachusetts Environmental Police are exempt from the requirements above.



### WARNING:

Gasoline vapors can explode. Before starting engine, operate blower for four minutes and check (using your nose) engine compartment for gasoline vapors.

Vessels built after July 31, 1980, which contain power exhaust blowers in gasoline engine compartments, must have the above warning sticker placed near the instrument panel.

### backfire

Explosion of prematurely ignited fuel or of unburned exhaust gases in an internal combustion engine

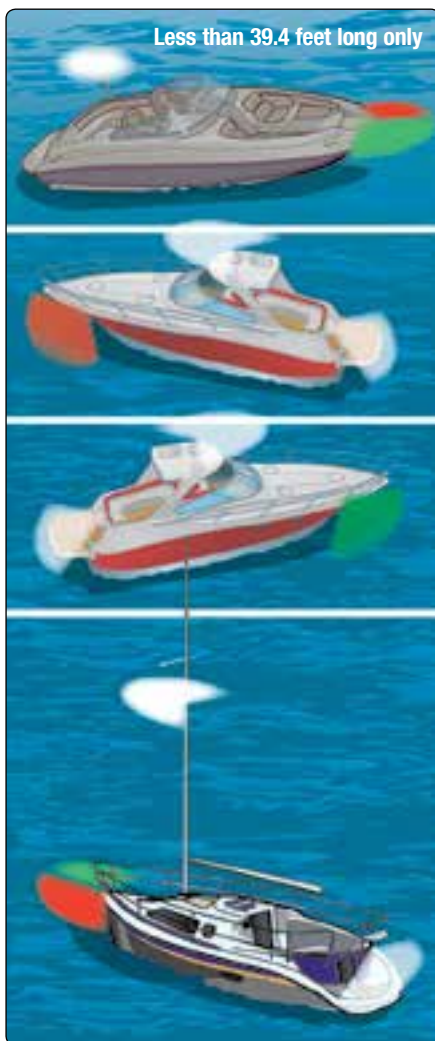
### cowl

Hooded opening designed to scoop in air



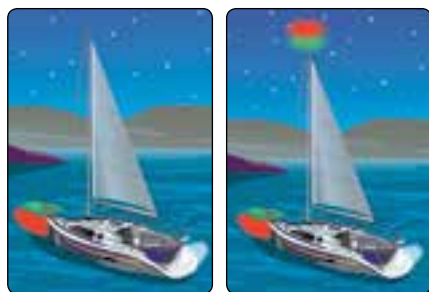
Powerboats are built to ventilate the engine when underway. As the boat moves along, an air intake scoops up fresh air and forces it down the air duct into the engine compartment. The exhaust sucks out the explosive fumes from the lowest part of the engine and fuel compartments.

## 1. Power-Driven Vessels Less Than 65.6 Feet



The red and green lighting must conform to the illustration above. Red should be on the left side of the bow and green on the right side of the bow.

## 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 Feet



To prevent a collision, 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.

## Navigation Lights

- Vessel operators must make sure that their vessels are equipped with the proper navigation lights and use the lights during these conditions:
  - When away from the dock between sunset and sunrise
  - During periods of restricted visibility such as fog or heavy rain
- The different types of navigation lights are described in “Navigation Lights” in Chapter 3. No other lights that may be mistaken for required navigation lights may be exhibited. *Note: Blue or red flashing lights are restricted to use by law enforcement vessels only.*
- The required navigation lights differ depending on the type and size of your vessel. The common lighting configurations for recreational vessels are discussed below. For other configurations and requirements for larger vessels, see the U.S. Coast Guard’s *Navigation Rules*.

## Power-Driven Vessels Less Than 65.6 Feet Long When Underway

If less than 65.6 feet (20 meters) 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 (12 meters) long, at least one mile away—on a dark, clear night.
- An all-round white light (if less than 39.4 feet long) 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 (one meter) higher than the sidelights.

## Unpowered Vessels When Underway

Unpowered vessels are sailing vessels 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 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.
  - A sternlight visible from a distance of at least two miles away.
- If less than 23.0 feet (7 meters) long, these vessels should:
  - If practical, exhibit the same lights as required for unpowered vessels less than 65.6 feet in length.
  - If not practical, have on hand at least one lantern or flashlight shining a white light as shown in illustration 3.

## All Vessels When Not Underway

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

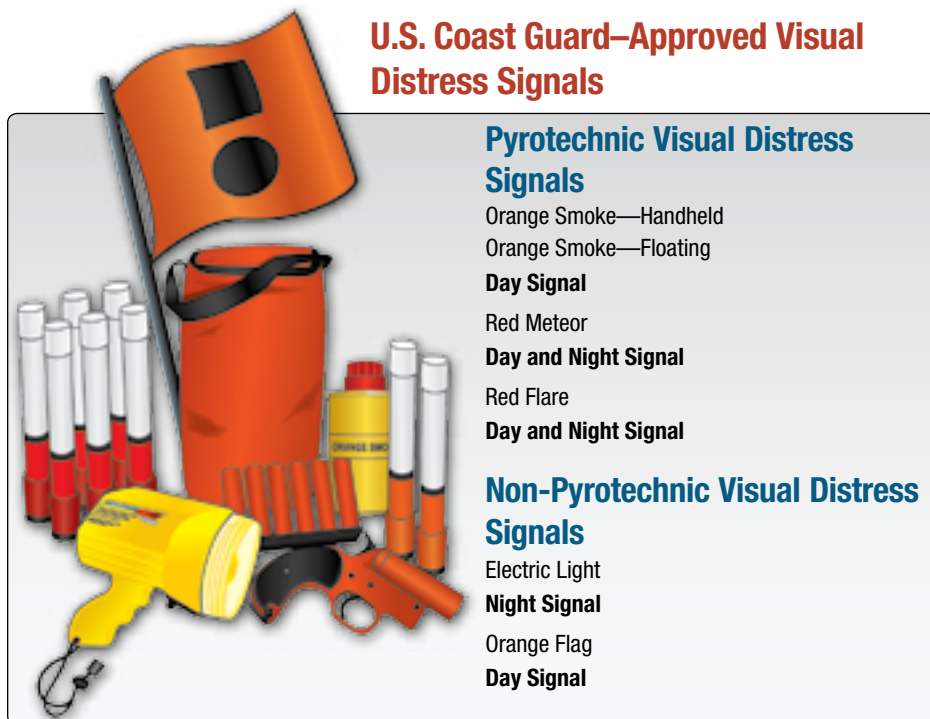


## Visual Distress Signals

Visual Distress Signals (VDSs) allow vessel operators to signal for help in the event of an emergency. VDSs are classified as day signals (visible in bright sunlight), night signals (visible at night), or both day and night signals. VDSs are either pyrotechnic (smoke and flames) or non-pyrotechnic (non-combustible).

- Vessels on **federally controlled waters** or on **Massachusetts coastal waters** must be equipped with U.S. Coast Guard–approved visual distress signals. 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
- VDSs must be U.S. Coast Guard–approved, in serviceable condition, and readily accessible.

### U.S. Coast Guard–Approved Visual Distress Signals



- 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 combinations of signals are examples of VDSs that could be carried on board to satisfy U.S. Coast Guard requirements:
  - Three handheld red flares (day and night)
  - One handheld red flare and two red meteors (day and night)
  - One handheld orange smoke signal (day), two floating orange smoke signals (day), and one electric light (night only)
- It is prohibited to display visual distress signals while on the water unless assistance is required to prevent immediate or potential danger to persons on board a vessel.

## Pyrotechnic Devices

- Pyrotechnics are excellent distress signals. However, there is potential for injury and property damage if not handled properly. These devices produce a very hot flame, and the residue can cause burns and ignite flammable materials.
- Pistol-launched and handheld parachute flares and meteors have many characteristics of a firearm and must be handled with caution. In some states, they are considered a firearm and are prohibited from use.
- Pyrotechnic devices should be stored in a cool, dry, and prominently marked location.

## Non-Pyrotechnic Devices

- The distress flag is a day signal only. It must be at least 3 x 3 feet with a black square and ball on an orange background.
- The electric distress light is accepted for night use only and must flash the international SOS distress signal automatically.



### 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.

### federally controlled waters

Waters on which vessels must observe federal requirements, including VDS requirements; these waters include:

- Coastal waters
- The Great Lakes
- Territorial seas
- Bodies of water connected directly to one of the above, up to a point where the body of water is less than two miles wide

### Massachusetts coastal waters

Any Massachusetts waters that are subject to the rise and fall of the tide out to three nautical miles from any Massachusetts land point and including all of Massachusetts Bay, Vineyard Sound, and Nantucket Sound

## Common Sound Signals

Some common sound signals that you should be familiar with as a recreational boater are as follows.

### Changing Direction

- **One short blast** tells other boaters “I intend to pass you on my port (left) side.”
- **Two short blasts** tell other boaters “I intend to pass you on my starboard (right) side.”
- **Three short blasts** tell other boaters “I am backing up.”

### 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 sailing vessels.

### Warning

- **One prolonged blast** is a warning signal (for example, used when coming around a blind 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.



Scuba divers and snorkelers should not place a flag in an area already occupied by other boaters or where their diving operation will impede the normal flow of waterway traffic. Divers also should follow all of the water safety rules themselves.

## Sound-Producing Devices

In periods of reduced visibility or whenever a vessel operator needs to signal his or her intentions or position, a sound-producing device is essential. The navigation rules for meeting head-on, crossing, and overtaking situations described in Chapter 3 are examples of when sound signals are required.

- If boating on Massachusetts state waters, the following requirements apply.
  - Vessels less than 26 feet in length, which includes PWCs, are required to carry on board a mouth-, hand-, or power-operated whistle or horn or some other means to make an efficient sound signal audible for at least one-half mile.
  - Vessels that are 26 feet or more in length are required to carry on board a whistle or horn, *and* a bell that are audible for at least one-half mile.
- These requirements apply to vessels operating on federally controlled waters.
  - Vessels less than 65.6 feet (20 meters) in length, which includes PWCs, are required to carry on board a whistle or horn or some other means to make an efficient sound signal audible for at least one-half mile.
  - Vessels that are 65.6 feet (20 meters) or more in length are required to carry on board a whistle or horn, *and* a bell that are audible for at least one mile.

## Other Equipment and Regulations

- **Diver-Down Flag:** Persons scuba diving, skin diving, or snorkeling must display a red and white divers flag. Divers or snorkelers must remain within 100 feet of the divers flag. If possible, vessel operators not engaged in the diving operation must stay at least 100 feet from a displayed flag. If not possible, vessel operators must reduce speed to no more than three miles per hour. Two types of flags are used to indicate diving activity.
  - *Divers Flag:* A rectangular red flag with a white diagonal stripe, at least 12 x 15 inches in size and constructed of rigidly supported material, must be displayed on a vessel or surface float and must extend a minimum distance of three feet up from the surface of the water.
  - *Alfa Flag:* A blue and white International Code Flag A (or Alfa flag) must be flown from a vessel restricted in its ability to maneuver. This flag indicates that the *vessel* is involved in a diving activity. The Alfa flag may be displayed in addition to the divers flag but does not replace the divers flag.
- **Anchor and Bailer:** All vessels propelled by a motor of any kind must have an anchor and sufficient line (rope) to anchor in the vessel's normal operating area, and a manual bailer. (PWCs are exempt from these requirements.)
- **Paddle/Oar:** All vessels less than 16 feet in length and propelled by a motor of any kind must carry a paddle or oar on board. (PWCs are exempt from this requirement.)
- **Ladder:** All vessels towing a person on water skis or similar devices must be equipped with a ladder, steps, platform, or similar device that can be used to retrieve the person being towed from the water.
- **Marine Events:** Permits for regattas, races, marine parades, tournaments, or exhibitions to be held on state waters must be obtained from the Massachusetts Environmental Police in advance of the event. If the event is being held on federally controlled waters, a permit from the U.S. Coast Guard is required.
- **Local Regulations:** Local waterways may have specific equipment and operational restrictions in addition to those covered in this chapter. Be sure to check for local regulations before you go boating.

## Requirements Specific to Personal Watercraft (PWCs)

In addition to adhering to all boating laws, PWC operators have requirements specific to their vessel.

- Every person on board a PWC must *wear* a U.S. Coast Guard–approved Type I, II, III, or V personal flotation device that is in good and serviceable condition.
- If the PWC is equipped with an ignition safety switch, the lanyard must be attached to the person, clothing, or PFD of the operator.
- PWCs may be operated only from sunrise to sunset.
- There are age and boater education requirements for operators of personal watercraft (see page 26).
- PWCs may not be operated within 150 feet of a swimmer, the shore, or a moored vessel unless operated at headway speed.
- PWCs may not be operated on any Massachusetts waters that are less than 75 acres in size.
- It is illegal to tow a water-skier or a person in any other manner behind a PWC.
- PWCs must be operated in a safe and responsible manner. For example, it is illegal to:
  - Jump the wake of another vessel.
  - Speed in restricted areas.
  - Follow within 150 feet of a water-skier.
  - Cross unreasonably close to another vessel.
  - Weave through congested waterway traffic.
  - Operate in a way that endangers the life, limb, or property of any person.
  - Chase or harass wildlife with your PWC.
- As with other vessels, PWCs are not allowed within 150 feet of public and private swimming beaches.

## Towing a Person With a Vessel Legally

Vessel operators towing a person(s) on water skis, surfboards, or similar devices must obey these laws also.

- It is illegal to tow a person on water skis or similar devices behind a PWC.
- Every vessel towing a person(s) on water skis or similar devices must have on board, in addition to the operator, an observer at least 12 years of age constantly observing the person being towed.
- Each person being towed behind a vessel on water skis or similar devices must *wear* a USCG–approved Type I, II, or III PFD.
- It is illegal for vessels to tow a person(s) on water skis or similar devices from sunset to sunrise.
- All vessels towing a person on water skis or similar devices must be equipped with a ladder, steps, a platform, or a similar device that can be used to retrieve the person being towed from the water.
- Everyone engaged in water-skiing—the operator and the towed person(s)—must conduct themselves in a safe and responsible manner.
  - Water-skiers must ski at a safe distance to prevent their wash from being thrown into or causing excessive rocking of other vessels, rafts, or floats.
  - The towing vessel must not be operated within 150 feet of shorelines being used as swimming areas or within 75 feet of floats or markers that designate swimming areas.
  - It is illegal for the vessel operator or for the towed person to be under the influence of alcohol or any controlled substance.
- Water-skiing is not permitted on some Massachusetts waterways. Check before you go boating.

### Remember ...

As an owner of a PWC, you are legally responsible if you allow your PWC to be operated by others in violation of Massachusetts law.



Water-skiers must ski at a safe distance to prevent their wash from being thrown into or causing excessive rocking of other vessels, rafts, or floats.



### Stay up-to-date on new boating laws!

Be sure to stay abreast of new boating laws and requirements.

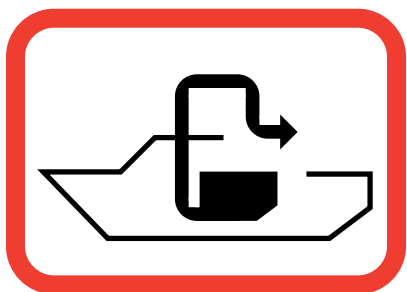
For state boating law information, contact the Massachusetts Environmental Police at

- 508-564-4961 or [www.mass.gov/ole](http://www.mass.gov/ole)

For federal boating laws, visit the U.S. Coast Guard's boating safety website:

- [www.uscgboating.org](http://www.uscgboating.org)

Information in this manual does not replace what is specifically legal for boating in Massachusetts, which is found in Massachusetts General Law, Code of Massachusetts Regulations, and federal law.



### Pump-Out Station Sign

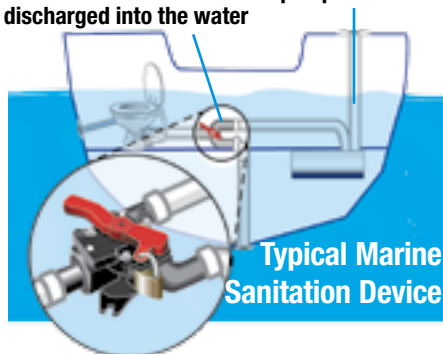
Signs like these are posted at pump-out stations in Massachusetts.



### Pump-Out Station

**"Y" valve must be secured so that waste cannot be discharged into the water**

↑  
Drainage to pump-out station



Typical Marine Sanitation Device



### What To Do in Case of Discharge

If your vessel discharges oil or hazardous substance(s) into the water, notify the U.S. Coast Guard by calling:

• **1-800-424-8802**

Also notify the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection by calling:

• **617-556-1133** in the Boston area

• **1-888-304-1133** toll-free, elsewhere

## Waste, Oil, and Trash Disposal in Massachusetts and Federal Waters

- It is illegal to discharge waste, oil, or trash into any state or federally controlled waters. This is for very good reasons.
  - Sewage carries disease and other pollutants that are harmful to people, aquatic plants, and animals.
  - Trash thrown into the water can injure swimmers and wildlife alike. It also can plug engine cooling water intakes.
  - Pollution is unsightly and takes away from your enjoyment of the water.
- Vessel operators need to be aware of the following regulations for waste, oil, and trash disposal that apply to both federally controlled and state waters. The Refuse Act prohibits throwing, discharging, or depositing any refuse matter of any kind (including trash, garbage, oil, and other liquid pollutants) into the waters of the United States.

### Discharge of Sewage and Waste

Massachusetts law states that it is unlawful to discharge raw sewage or other refuse into Massachusetts waters. If you have a recreational vessel with installed toilet facilities, it must have on board an operable marine sanitation device (MSD) that is self-contained and incapable of discharging directly into the water.

- There are three types of MSDs.
  - Types I and II MSDs are usually found on large vessels. Waste is treated with special chemicals to kill bacteria before the waste is discharged. Types I and II MSDs with "Y" valves that would direct the waste overboard must be secured so that the valve cannot be opened. This can be done by placing a lock or non-reusable seal on the "Y" valve or by taking the handle off the "Y" valve.
  - Type III MSDs provide no treatment and are either holding tanks or portable toilets. Collected waste should be taken ashore and disposed of in a pump-out station or onshore toilet.
- Vessels 65 feet or less in length may use a Type I, II, or III MSD. Vessels over 65 feet in length must install a Type II or III MSD.
- All installed devices must be U.S. Coast Guard-certified.

### Discharge of Trash

The Act to Prevent Pollution from Ships places limitations on the discharge of garbage from vessels. It is illegal to dump refuse, garbage, or plastics into any state or federally controlled waters.

- 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 in a prominent location. The Garbage Disposal Placard is a durable sign that is at least 4 x 9 inches and notifies passengers and crew about discharge restrictions.

### Discharge of Oil and Other Hazardous Substances

Regulations issued under the Federal Water Pollution Control Act require all vessels with propulsion machinery to have a capacity to retain oil mixtures on board.

- You are not allowed to discharge oil or hazardous substances. The penalty for illegal discharge may be a fine of up to \$10,000.
- You are not allowed to dump oil into the bilge of the vessel without means for proper disposal. Fuel spills can be removed using absorbent bilge pads.

- 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.
- You must notify the National Response Center immediately if your vessel discharges oil or hazardous substances in the water. Call toll-free **1-800-424-8802**. Report the discharge's location, color, source, substances, size, and time observed. You also must call the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection at **1-888-304-1133** and report the discharge.
- 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 following:

### Discharge of Oil Prohibited

The Federal Water Pollution Control Act prohibits the discharge of oil or oily waste upon or into any navigable waters of the U.S. The prohibition includes any discharge which causes a film or discoloration of the surface of the water or causes a sludge or emulsion beneath the surface of the water. Violators are subject to substantial civil and/or criminal sanctions including fines and imprisonment.

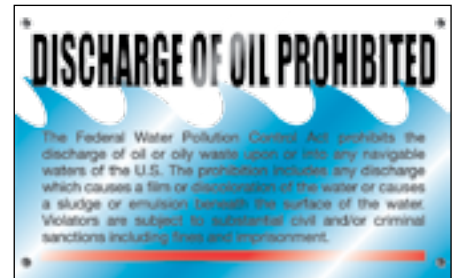
### Help Keep Massachusetts Waters Clean

Boaters in Massachusetts have a role to play in preserving the aquatic environment. What we do as individuals can make a real difference in keeping our waters safe and clean for everyone.

- To help keep our waters clean:
  - Make it a policy on your vessel that nothing goes overboard. If you had room to bring it, there's room to take it back!
  - Take reusable containers and recycle your paper, cans, and bottles whenever possible.
  - Encourage your marina to establish recycling facilities and pump-out stations.
  - Avoid products that remove stains or make your boat shine—they can be very toxic.
  - Use or request that your boatyard use the least damaging bottom paints available.
- For more information, contact Massachusetts Coastal Zone Management at **617-626-1200**.

### Please Pump Out

- Boaters can help reduce water pollution by pumping out their sewage. Pump-out stations provide wet vacuums that draw sewage out of a boat's holding tanks for proper disposal.
- Pump-out stations allow boaters to comply with the Federal Clean Water Act, which prohibits the discharge of untreated sewage in coastal waters within three miles of shore.
  - With the assistance of federal funding, the number of pump-out stations (and pump-out boats) has increased significantly. Boaters have responded by using them, which already has improved coastal water quality.
  - Pump-out stations also are available in the seven No Discharge Areas (NDAs) in Massachusetts (see sidebar).
- Use the pump-out stations to keep sewage out of our fishing and swimming areas.



### Oil Discharge Placard

A 5 x 8-inch sign that states the law pertaining to oil discharge

### No Discharge Areas (NDAs) in Massachusetts

It is illegal to dump both treated and untreated sewage in these NDAs:

- All of Buzzards Bay
- Waquoit Bay in Falmouth
- Three Bays/Centerville Harbor in Barnstable
- Coastal Waters of Harwich
- Stage Harbor in Chatham
- Wellfleet Harbor
- Coastal Waters of Nantucket from Muskeget Island to Great Point, including Nantucket Harbor

For a complete list, please visit

[www.mass.gov/czm/nda/locations.htm](http://www.mass.gov/czm/nda/locations.htm)

### Waste Management Plan

- Ocean-going vessels that are 40 feet or more in length with cooking and sleeping facilities must have a written Waste Management Plan.
- The captain of the vessel is responsible for implementing the Waste Management Plan.
- The Waste Management Plan, identifying the vessel's name and home port, should be posted and should include directives to all persons on board about:
  - Discharging sewage and hazardous substances
  - Discharging garbage and other food waste
  - Disposing of plastics, bottles, and cans
  - Reading applicable placards for additional information
  - Advising the captain in case of oily discharges or diesel spills

## Boating Accident Report Form

This form can be downloaded at  
[www.mass.gov/ole](http://www.mass.gov/ole)



Massachusetts Environmental Police officers and all other officers with law enforcement authority have the right to stop and board vessels in order to check for compliance with state and federal laws.

## Boating Accidents and Casualties ... What the Law Requires You To Do

- An operator involved in a boating accident must:
  - Stop his or her vessel *immediately* at the scene of the accident *and ...*
  - Assist anyone injured or in danger from the accident, unless doing so would seriously endanger his or her own vessel or passengers *and ...*
  - Give, in writing, his or her name, address, and vessel identification to anyone injured and to the owner of any property damaged by the accident.
- The operator of a vessel is required to submit a written report to the Massachusetts Environmental Police whenever an accident results in:
  - The death of a person *or ...*
  - The disappearance of a person under circumstances that indicate the possibility of death or injury *or ...*
  - Any injury requiring medical attention *or ...*
  - Property damage exceeding \$500.
- Accidents resulting in death or serious injury must be reported to the Massachusetts Environmental Police within 48 hours. All other accident reports must be submitted within five days.
- Accidents should be reported on a Boating Accident Report form available from the Massachusetts Environmental Police.

## Enforcement

Massachusetts Environmental Police officers, harbor masters, police officers assigned to harbor patrol, fish and game wardens, and state police officers enforce the boating laws of Massachusetts. Town police and harbor masters also may enforce local recreational boating laws. U.S. Coast Guard officers patrol and have enforcement authority on federally controlled waters.

- Officers have the authority to stop and board any recreational vessel at any time to check equipment and registration and to positively identify the vessel operator.
- It is illegal to refuse to follow the directive of a person with law enforcement authority. An operator who has received a visual or audible signal from a law enforcement officer must bring his or her vessel to a stop.
- Officers may arrest, without a warrant, anyone in violation of, or believed to be in violation of, the boating laws of Massachusetts.
- Officers empowered to enforce state boating laws and U.S. Coast Guard officers enforcing federal laws may terminate the use of vessels if they find an “unsafe condition” (see page 27).