

PART FIVE: Boating Regulations



Boating laws and regulations are enacted primarily to protect today's boater. Stay abreast of new rules and regulations; they may change yearly.

Enforcement

Recreational boating in Connecticut has increased dramatically in the past decade. Boating laws and regulations must be adhered to. Questions regarding specific laws and regulations or violations should be directed to the nearest Law Enforcement District.

District	Area of Responsibility	Telephone
Marine District (Old Lyme)	Connecticut Shoreline Towns	(860) 434-0316
Eastern District (Marlborough)	East of Connecticut River and Middlesex County	(860) 295-9523
Western District (Harwinton)	West of Connecticut River	(860) 485-0226
Turn in Poachers (TIP)		1 800 842-4357
Emergency Communications (24 hours)*		(860) 424-3333

* You can report violations of boating laws and regulations to Emergency Communications. Include the following information when you call: (1) the registration number of the violator, (2) the violation, (3) the date, time, location, and (4) your name and address.

Several law enforcement agencies enforce Connecticut's state statutes and regulations and federal navigational laws. The United States Coast Guard patrols federal waters and enforces federal laws. Municipal police officers, state conservation police officers, town marine officers, lake patrolmen and certified harbor masters are empowered to enforce state boating regulations. In their jurisdiction, enforcement officers have authority to stop and board boats to check for compliance with federal or state law or to search without warrant, upon probable cause that other laws have been violated.

Law enforcement vessels engaged in enforcement activities may display a flashing blue light or audible signal. When you see a vessel with flashing blue lights or hear an audible signal, slacken speed, yield right of way, or if signaled to do so, stop your vessel.

No flashing lights, except flashing yellow lights on high speed ferries, submarines and air cushion vessels and alternating flashing, yellow and red lights on vessels used for public safety activities, may be displayed by vessels other than law enforcement vessels. No sirens shall be used on vessels other than law enforcement vessels, except that any vessel may be equipped with a theft alarm if it is designed so that it cannot be used as an ordinary warning signal.

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions will prove useful in understanding the rules and regulations related to boating.

Motorboat. A vessel, not more than 65 feet in length and propelled by machinery, whether or not such machinery is the principal source of propulsion, including electric motors.

Personal Watercraft. (jet-ski type vessel) Any inboard powered vessel less than 16 feet in length which has an internal combustion engine powering a water-jet pump as its primary source of motor propulsion and which is designed to be operated by a person sitting, standing or kneeling on the vessel rather than the conventional manner of sitting or standing inside the vessel.

Regulated Navigational Area. Water area within a defined boundary for which regulations for vessels navigating within the area have been established under 33 CFR Part 165.

Restricted Visibility: Conditions in which visibility is restricted by fog, mist, falling snow, heavy rainstorms, sandstorms or any other similar causes.

Safety Zone. A water area, shore area, or water and shore area to which, for safety or environmental purposes, access is limited to authorized persons, vehicles or vessels. The Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection is authorized to create temporary safety zones for a period not to exceed 72 consecutive hours, unless an emergency warrants otherwise.

Sailboat. Any vessel propelled by sail alone.

Security Zone. An area of land, water, or land and water, which is designated under 33 CFR Part 165 by the United States Coast Guard for such time as is necessary to prevent injury or damage to the area or to secure the observance of the rights and obligations of the United States.

Slow-No-Wake. A vessel shall not produce more than a minimum wake and shall not attain speeds greater than 6 miles per hour over the ground unless a higher minimum speed is necessary to maintain steerageway when traveling with a strong current. In no case shall the wake produced by the vessel be such that it creates a danger or injury to persons, or will damage vessels or structures of any kind.

Underway. When a vessel is not moored, anchored, made fast to the shore, or aground.

Vessel. Every type of watercraft, other than a seaplane on water, used or capable of being used as a means of transportation on water.

Wing-In-Ground. An effect vessel that is capable of operating completely above the surface of the water on a dynamic cushion created by aerodynamic lift due to the ground effect between the vessel and the water surface.

Restricted Safety and Security Zones

No person shall operate, allow the operation of a vessel, or anchor any vessel on the waters of the state within a safety or security zone or a regulated navigational area. This provision also applies to temporary safety zones established by the Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection.

Restricted Operating Distances and Speed Areas

No person shall operate a vessel or cause a water-skier to pass within one hundred feet of a flag, buoy or other device, marking the location of an underwater swimmer or diver.

No person shall operate a motorboat, excluding a personal watercraft, at a speed in excess of Slow-No-Wake within 100 feet of shore, or a dock, pier, float or anchored or moored vessel, unless taking off or landing a water-skier.

No person shall operate a personal watercraft, at a speed in excess of Slow-No-Wake within 200 feet of shore, or a dock, pier, float or anchored or moored vessel, unless taking off or landing a water-skier.

When within 100 feet of buoys marking a restricted swimming area or boat access area, vessels shall be operated at the minimum speed necessary to maintain steerage.

Speed Regulations

When no limits are posted, operate the boat so it will not endanger others. The boat must be able to stop safely within the clear distance ahead. When passing near marinas, fishing areas, swimming areas, a vessel at anchor, or similar places, reduce speed. Operators are responsible for damage caused by their wakes.

In Connecticut, speed is limited by law for certain conditions and areas. Comply with posted regulatory signs and the regulations printed within this chapter.

Every vessel must, under crowded conditions or in reduced visibility, go at a moderate speed with careful regard for existing circumstances and conditions. Actions such as speeding in confined or restricted areas or skiing at prohibited times or in restricted areas can also be construed as reckless or negligent operation.

Reckless Operation

Reckless operation is the failure to exercise the degree of care necessary to prevent endangering another person or their property.

Reckless operation in the first degree is an offense committed when a person operates a vessel at such speed or maneuvers a vessel in such a manner as to result in death, serious physical injury to another person or damage to property in excess of \$1,000. A second-degree offense is committed when a person operates a vessel at such speed or maneuvers a vessel in such a manner as to endanger the life, limb or property of another.

Any person guilty of reckless operation of a vessel in the first degree while under the influence of intoxicating liquor or any drug, or both, will be fined and/or imprisoned and will have their boating privileges suspended for up to six months, or more if it is not their first offense.

Age Restrictions

No person under 16 years of age, who has been issued a Certificate of Personal Watercraft Operation (CPWO) after March 9, 2004, may operate a personal watercraft without the onboard supervision of a person who is at least 18 years of age and in possession of a CPWO. Operators between the age of 12 and 16, who were issued a CPWO on or before March 9, 2004, may operate a personal watercraft by themselves, although the DEP recommends that they be accompanied by a person 18 years or older who possesses a certificate. All out of state boaters must be 16 to operate a personal watercraft by themselves.

No person under 12 years of age shall operate a vessel with greater than 10 horsepower unless accompanied by a person at least 18 years old. Both persons must have certificates to operate.

Hazardous Conditions

Enforcement officers can terminate a voyage and require the operator to return to the nearest mooring if they discover a hazardous condition. The operator must then correct this condition before proceeding on his way.

The conditions listed below are considered especially hazardous:

1. Inadequate number of life jackets or fire extinguishers.
2. Overloading. (Check capacity plate information.)
3. Failure to display required navigation lights.
4. Fuel leakage.
5. Fuel accumulation (other than fuel tank).
6. Failure to meet ventilation requirements.

7. Failure to meet carburetor backfire flame arrestor requirements.
8. Excessive leakage or accumulation of water in the bilge.

Mooring to Buoys

The only buoys you are permitted to moor to are mooring buoys. Mooring to a navigation buoy or other aid to navigation or regulatory marker is illegal.

Overloading

Never overload your boat with passengers or cargo beyond its safe carrying capacity. Having regard for weather and other operating conditions, safe carrying capacity is determined on boats, less than 20 feet manufactured after 1972, by the capacity information label affixed by the manufacturer. Connecticut law forbids altering, defacing or removing the plate.

On boats with no capacity information label, use the following formula to determine the number of persons your vessel can safely carry in good weather conditions:

PERSONS (average 150 lbs. each) = Length (ft) x width (ft) divided by 15

Riding on Decks or Gunwales

While underway in a vessel under power, do not ride on the bow, gunwale, transom, or in any position which is obviously dangerous. If there is no railing or other deterrent to falling overboard, you might do just that. In addition to being against the law and unsafe, riding on or hanging over the bow can interfere with stability and may restrict the operator's visibility. No operator of a vessel under power shall allow any person to be on a decked-over bow of such vessel while underway unless the bow of the vessel is equipped with a handrail that encompasses the bow, and all persons on the bow are inward of such handrail. On vessels under power with open bows not decked-over, no operator shall allow any person to sit or stand on the gunwale at the bow of the vessel while underway. These provisions shall not apply to persons in or on the bow of vessels engaged in anchoring, mooring, or docking activities, and when the vessel is proceeding at a dead slow speed.

Interference with Navigation

Never obstruct a channel or fairway or interfere with the travel of other boats. Avoid anchoring in heavily traveled areas. Do not block launching areas. Never moor to a navigation buoy or other aid to navigation, or a regulatory marker.

Diving and Underwater Operations

In Connecticut, anyone involved in underwater swimming or diving is required to display a clearly visible red flag with a white diagonal stripe. The flag must be two-sided, not less than 13 inches high and 15 inches long. The white diagonal stripe must be reflectorized if the flag is to be used at night.

It is extremely dangerous and a violation of the law for a diver to surface or swim more than 50 feet from this flag.

No more than four divers may use the same diver flag unless it is displayed from

a boat, in which case the number of divers must be limited to the legal capacity of the boat.

The blue/white ALPHA flag is also used to show underwater operations from a vessel in federal waters. It may be used in addition to the state's diver down flag. It is illegal to snorkel or SCUBA dive from a state boat launch. Boaters must not come within 100 ft. of the dive flag.



Water-skiing, Parasailing and Wing-In-Ground (WIG) Vessel

In Connecticut, water-skiers are required by law to wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved personal flotation device (life jacket) while engaged in water-skiing, except for those skiers who are engaged in barefoot water-skiing and are wearing a specifically designed "barefoot wetsuit" and those skiers who are engaged in trick water-skiing and are wearing standard double trick skis at least 8 inches wide and not over 46 inches long, and being towed at not more than 20 mph using a tow rope longer than 50 feet long.

A life jacket must be made readily available aboard the tow vessel for each skier electing not to wear one under the above exceptions, in addition to those life jackets normally required to be aboard. Ski belts and inflatable life jackets are not permitted.

The operator of the boat is required to have a responsible observer at least 12 years of age to assist the operator and monitor the progress of the water-skier. The water-skier, the observer, and the boat operator shall use hand signals for communication. The maximum length of a towline measured from the tow post to the water-skier's tow handle is 100 feet.

No elastic component may be part of the towline. When not engaged in towing a water-skier, the rigid metal tow pole, often used for barefoot skiing, may either be removed from the boat or must be dismantled or folded and placed inside of the gunwale and parallel to the center line of the boat.

The operator of the vessel and the water-skier are responsible for operating in a manner which does not harm or strike another person or vessel. Water-skiing is forbidden between ½ hour after sunset until sunrise or when visibility is restricted to less than 100 yards.

Operation of a vessel at a speed in excess of Slow-No-Wake within 100 feet of shore, or 200 feet for personal watercraft, is illegal. Therefore, water-skiing in a narrow channel or river less than 200 feet wide or 400 feet for personal watercraft is a violation.

Towing of a person or persons on an inner tube without handholds is prohibited.

Kite-skiing and parasailing are prohibited anywhere water-skiing is prohibited or subject to special regulations. Kite-skiers and parasailers shall not fly over or under obstructions such as utility lines and bridges; nor shall they fly over dams, locks, docks, launching ramps, swim areas, marinas or congested areas.

All water-ski jumps and slalom courses require a permit. Contact the Boating Division or visit our website for information.

Self-propelled water-skis and surfboards, and remote control devices which tow water-skiers, are prohibited in Connecticut.

HAND SIGNALS

A water-skier, his/her observer, and the boat operator shall use the following hand signals for communications:

Faster — palm pointing upward



Slower — palm pointing downward.



Speed OK — arm upraised with thumb and forefinger forming circle.



Right Turn — arm outstretched, pointing right.



Left Turn — arm outstretched, pointing left.



Return to Drop-Off Area — arm to 45 degree angle from body pointing down to water and swinging toward area to be dropped off.

Cut Motor — finger drawn across throat.

Stop — hand up, palm facing forward policeman-style.



Skier OK After Fall — hands clenched overhead.

Pick Me Up — “Watch Out - Fallen Skier” — one ski extended vertically out of the water.

A wing-in-ground (WIG) effect vessel, (as defined on page 44) must be approved by the DEP before operating recreationally and by the U.S. Coast Guard before operating for commercial or for research purposes.

Personal Watercraft Restrictions

Personal Watercraft, (as defined on page 43), are subject to the following operation restrictions:

- No person shall operate a personal watercraft between sunset and sunrise or during periods of reduced visibility.
- All persons aboard a personal watercraft shall wear a United States Coast Guard approved Type I, II, III or V personal flotation device, and no operator of a personal watercraft shall allow any person to be aboard who is not wearing such a device. Inflatable life jackets are not allowed.
- No person shall operate a personal watercraft at a speed in excess of **Slow-No-Wake** within two hundred feet of shore or of a dock, pier, float or anchored or moored vessel, unless said personal watercraft is approaching such float, dock or shore for the purpose of enabling a person engaged in water-skiing to take off or land.
- No person shall operate a personal watercraft towing a water-skier and no person shall water-ski while being towed by a personal watercraft unless: (1) a capacity label affixed by the manufacturer indicates a carrying capacity of at least three persons: the operator, the observer and the skier, (2) minimum overall length of 119 inches, minimum overall width of 46 inches, minimum horizontal seat length of 39 inches [at least 13 inches additional seat length per person for greater than three person capacity], (3) handholds at or near the rear of the seat suitable for use by a rearward-facing observer, and (4) an observer age 12 or older facing the skier at all times. The boat operator, observer and water-skier must obey all other water-ski rules.
- No person operating a personal watercraft shall cross or jump the wake of another vessel, when within one hundred feet of the vessel creating such wake, in such a manner that the hull of the personal watercraft jumping the wake completely leaves the water.
- A “shut-off lanyard,” if so equipped, **must be attached** to the operator, his clothing, or his personal flotation device in a manner which will shut off the engine in the event the operator is ejected from the personal watercraft while underway.

Marine Event Permits

No marine parade, regatta, race, tournament, pyrotechnic displays (fireworks) over water, or exhibition shall be permitted on inland waters of the state except when authorized by the DEP. Applications must be received at least **30** days prior to the event. Contact the Boating Division for information. If your event is on tidal waters, contact the U.S. Coast Guard for authorization at www.uscg.mil/d1/units/seclis/.

Marker (i.e. Buoy or Beacon) Permits

Placement of any marker other than a diver's flag requires a permit from the DEP. This requirement includes swim area designations, placement of speed limit restrictions, and placement of navigation and information buoys, as well as placement of water-ski slalom courses and jumps. Contact the Boating Division or visit the Boating Division website at www.dep.state.ct.us/rec/boating for more details.

Boating Under the Influence (BUI)

No person may operate a boat while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. The penalties for operating a vessel under the influence of alcohol or drugs in Connecticut have increased. The laws for boating under the influence have been amended to mirror motor vehicle law.

As of October 1, 2003, a person shall be considered to be under the influence of intoxicating liquor if the ratio of alcohol in the blood is 8-hundredths (.08) of one percent or more of alcohol, by weight, or if the person is under 21 years of age, the level is .02. The penalty for a first violation may be: a fine between \$500 and \$1,000. One year suspension of boating privileges, 6 months (at least 48 hours of which cannot be suspended or reduced) in jail or suspended plus probation requiring 100 hours community service.

The penalty for a second violation within ten years may be: a fine between \$1,000 and \$4,000, three years suspension of boating privileges, two years (at least 120 days of which cannot be suspended or reduced) in jail and probation requiring 100 hours of community service.

The penalty for a third violation and subsequent violations within ten years may be: a fine between \$2,000 and \$8,000, suspension of boating privileges for life, three years (at least 1 year of which cannot be suspended or reduced) in jail and probation requiring 100 hours of community service. Penalties for refusal to submit to a chemical test are more substantial than failing the test.

Boating Accidents

All operators of vessels involved in an accident must remain at the scene and assist any other vessel or person involved in the accident if it is possible to do so without endangering their own vessel or the people aboard. The operator must also give his/her name, address and vessel identification number to the other operator(s) or owner of the damaged property.

Boating Accident Reports

The operator of a vessel involved in a boating accident which results in any of the circumstances noted below shall IMMEDIATELY notify the nearest law enforcement agency having jurisdiction over such accident and, not later than 48 hours after the accident, report the matter in writing on a form provided by the Department of Environmental Protection, Boating Division.

1. The death of any person from whatever cause.
2. The disappearance of any person from on board.
3. The injury of any person sufficient to require medical attention beyond simple first aid.

Any accident in which the total damages to all property affected is in excess of \$500 must be reported by the operator not later than 5 days after the accident on forms provided by the Department of Environmental Protection. The form can be downloaded by visiting the DEP website: www.dep.state.ct.us/rec/boating.

The operator of the vessel must make out the report. If for any reason the operator cannot make out the report, the owner or any survivor of the accident should initiate the report.

Required Reporting by Towboat Operators

Except in an emergency, no vessel towboat operator who, for a fee or other compensation, conducts vessel towing services for recreational boaters shall take under tow any vessel which has been involved in a boating accident or has been abandoned without first notifying federal, state or municipal law enforcement authorities and the owner of the vessel. In the event circumstances are such that the vessel should be immediately towed to safety to prevent loss of the vessel or injury to passengers, the towboat operator shall immediately notify such authorities upon reaching safe harbor. Failure to notify law enforcement authorities and the vessel owner as required shall be an infraction.

Violation of other statutes not listed here may require a court appearance. Consult the statutes or applicable penalties.

STATUTE NO.	INFRACTION	TOTAL AMOUNT DUE
15-9(a)	Failure to obey order of harbormaster	\$174.00
15-129(a)(1)	Insufficient personal flotation devices	75.00
15-129(a)(1)	Failure of owner or operator of vessel to require child(ren) under 12 years old to wear a personal flotation device	75.00
15-129(a)(3)	Improper or defective flame arrestor or backfire trap	75.00
15-129(a)(4)	Defective muffling device	75.00
15-129(a)(5)	Failure to carry fire extinguisher	75.00
15-129(a)(6)	Failure to carry whistle, horn, bell	75.00
15-129(a)(7)	Failure to carry or improper display of visual distress signals	75.00
15-129(c)	Exceeding permitted noise level	220.00
15-129(e)	Failure to comply with order re noise test (first offense)	435.00
15-129(e)	Failure to comply with order re noise test (subsequent offense)	535.00
15-129(h)	Altered muffler	120.00
15-129a(a)	Failure to display prescribed lights when underway	75.00
15-129a(d)	Failure to display anchor light	75.00
15-131	Violations of rules for preventing collisions	75.00
15-132	Failure to help collision victim	120.00
15-133(b)	Interference with navigation	120.00
15-133(c)	Alteration of boat capacity label	220.00
15-133(f)	Violation of boating regulations	75.00
15-133(g)	Improper mooring to navigational aid	220.00
15-134(a)	Failure to have an observer while towing skier	80.00
15-134(b)	Skiing in prohibited area	80.00
15-134(c)	Illegal skiing in darkness	80.00
15-134(d)	Reckless skiing	80.00
15-135(a)	Failure to use SCUBA flag, buoy or other device	75.00
15-135(c)	Operating a vessel within 100 feet of SCUBA flag	75.00
15-139(b)	Violation of boating safety regulations	80.00
15-140b	Illegal marine parade, regattas, races	80.00
15-140c	Illegal abandonment of vessel	80.00
15-140d	Illegal obstruction to navigation or public use of waters	80.00
15-140e	Operation of a boat without a certificate or vessel operator license	120.00
15-140g	Failure to carry boating operation certificate	120.00
15-140h	Illegal operation of a boat by a person less than 12 years old	80.00
15-140j	Illegal operation of personal watercraft	120.00
15-140m	Reckless boating, second degree	120.00
15-142(a)	Failure to number vessel/ have documents	75.00
15-144(a)	Failure to display registration decals	75.00
15-144(a)	Failure to carry vessel registration	75.00
15-144(c)	Failure to display vessel registration	75.00
15-144(h)	Illegal operation of vessel without number/registration (first offense)	120.00
15-146	Failure to report change of address	75.00
15-147	Failure to report transfer, loss or theft of vessel	75.00
15-149a(a)	Failure to notify law enforcement agency and make written report to DEP of boating accident involving death, serious injury or disappearance	136.00
15-149a(a)	Failure to make written report to DEP of boating accident involving property damage in excess of \$500.00	75.00
15-153	Altering or defacing registration or certificate of number	75.00
15-154(b)	Avoidance of officer	75.00
15-171	Discharging sewage in No Discharge Zone	up to 25,000.00
15-175(a)	Discharge of untreated sewage	up to 2,000.00
15-175(b)	Inoperable MSD	75.00
26-16-1	Prohibited acts at boat launches	75.00
26-19	Operation of motorboat in Bantam River	50.00
26-21	Defacing, obliterating or destroying posted notice	77.00