



Boating safety tips released by Sheriff's Department

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By **Sherry Kuyt | Advance Newspapers**

The Allegan County Sheriff's Department would like to prevent injuries and deaths related to watercraft this season.

Following is a list of basic boating rules from Lt. Frank Baker. They are based on the current laws in Michigan.

Make sure the boat is registered and the validation sticker and registration numbers are affixed properly.



Brian Forde

The only exceptions to this rule are privately owned rowboats 16 feet or less in length; privately owned non-motorized canoes or kayaks; and vessels registered in another state or country using Michigan waters for 60 days or less.

Know the capacity of the boat. Check the capacity plate or the owner's manual if you don't know it.

Be safe when fueling. If your boat is equipped with a power ventilation system, always use it. Do not fill to the brim, leave room for expansion.

Who may operate a boat?

Those under 12 years of age may operate a boat powered by a motor of no more than 6 horsepower (hp) legally without restrictions.

Those under 12 may also operate a boat powered by a motor of more than 6hp but no more than 35 hp legally only if they are directly supervised on board by a person at least 16 years of age.

Those 12 – 15 years of age may operate a boat powered by a motor of no more than 6 hp legally without restrictions.

Those 12 - 15 years may also operate a boat powered by a motor of more than 6 hp legally only if they:

- Have passed a boating safety course approved by the Department of Natural Resources and have on board their boating safety certificate, **OR**
- Are accompanied on board by a person at least 16 years of age.

Those 16 years of age or older may operate a boat on Michigan waters.

Who may operate a personal watercraft (PWC)?

Those less than 14 years of age may not legally operate a PWC.

Those 14 and 15 years of age may operate a PWC legally only if they have obtained a boating safety certificate, **AND**

- He or she is accompanied on board by his or her parent or legal guardian or by a person at least 21 years of age who has been designated by the parent or legal guardian, **OR**
- He or she is operating or riding the PWC at a distance of not more than 100 feet from his or her parent or legal guardian or from a person at least 21 years of age who has been designated by the parent or legal guardian.

Those at least 16 years of age and born after December 31, 1978 may operate a PWC legally only if they have obtained a boating safety certificate.

Those born before December 31, 1978 may operate a PWC legally without restrictions.

Personal flotation devices must be on board.

The operator of a watercraft is responsible to make sure that personal flotation devices (PFDs) must be available for each person on board or being towed.

The U.S. Coast Guard requires that there be at least one Type I, II, or III PFD that is Coast Guard approved, wearable, and of proper size for each person on board or being towed.

Michigan PFD law permits a vessel less than 16 feet long, or is a canoe or kayak, to choose to have either a wearable type I, II, or III or a throwable PFD type IV for each person on board.

In addition to the above requirements, one US Coast Guard approved type IV PFD must be on board vessels 16 feet or longer and be readily accessible.

Michigan Law requires all children under 6 years of age to Wear US Coast Guard approved Type I or Type II PFD while on the open deck of any vessel.

Each person under 12 years of age riding on or towed behind a PWC must wear a US Coast Guard approved Type I or Type II PFD.

Each person over 12 years of age riding on or towed behind a PWC must wear a US Coast Guard approved Type I, Type II, or Type III PFD.

Inflatable PFDs are not allowed on a PWC.

All PFDs must be in good and serviceable condition, and be readily accessible.

More detailed information regarding PFDs can be found at <http://www.pfdma.org/>

Source: Handbook of Michigan Boating Laws and Responsibilities, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and <http://www.boat-ed.com/michigan/>

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