

# **BOAT ALABAMA** **CERTIFICATION MANUAL**



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EDITION 2015

**ALEA**  
**Marine Patrol Division**



## Dear Alabama Boater:

The Roberson/Archer Act passed by the Alabama Legislature in 1994 requires boater certification for all operators of motorized vessels. The Act was named in memory of three Alabama children—Lauren Archer, age 4, and Katey and Ashleigh Roberson, ages 5 and 9, who were tragically killed in boating accidents in 1993. Their deaths and a crusade by their families led to the passage of the Act, which has been widely acclaimed as a national model for boating safety law.

This manual is designed to assist you in achieving two primary objectives: (1) to help you qualify for Alabama boat operator's certification and (2) to help you become a better informed and safer operator. The information contained in this manual is not intended to be an official legal reference for all boating laws and regulations. It is intended to explain in common language those laws, regulations, and boating practices you will need most often. In addition, the procedure for obtaining your boat operator's certification is discussed.

Marine Patrol troopers patrol our waterways to make your boating experience safe and pleasant. Cooperate with them while operating your boat by following the suggestions outlined in this manual as well as the rules of common courtesy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Walter S. Thompson".

Major Walter S. Thompson, Chief  
Marine Patrol Division

The logo features the word "BOAT" in a large, blue, 3D-style font with a white outline. To its left is a red and white graphic resembling a boat's wake or a stylized flag. To the right of "BOAT" is the word "ALABAMA" in a large, white, 3D-style font with a blue outline. Below "BOAT ALABAMA" is the words "CERTIFICATION MANUAL" in a bold, red, sans-serif font.

# **BOAT ALABAMA** **CERTIFICATION MANUAL**

**Sponsored by**  
**ALEA Marine Patrol Division**

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**Major Walter S. Thompson, Chief**

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# How To Use This Manual

Every person who operates a motorized vessel on Alabama's waterways must have obtained Alabama boater safety certification. You may obtain Alabama boater safety certification by showing valid proof of passing an approved boating safety course (see page 14) or by passing a certification exam given by the Alabama Department of Public Safety Driver's License Division. This manual is designed to prepare you to take the certification exam given by the Alabama Department of Public Safety Driver's License Division.

## Take the Department of Public Safety Driver's License Division Certification Exam

If you choose to obtain your Alabama boater safety certification by taking the exam given by the Alabama Department of Public Safety Driver's License Division, you should:

1. Study this manual to prepare for the exam.
2. Go to the Department of Public Safety Driver's License Examining Office in your county of residence to take the 25-question exam. You will be required to present personal identification.
3. Upon passing (answering 20 of the 25 questions correctly), apply for your Alabama boater safety certification. You will have the "V" class placed on your automobile driver's license. Or, if you do not have an automobile driver's license, you will be issued a "Vessel Only" license.

## Or ... Take the Online Course and Certification Exam

You can take an approved boating safety course online at [www.boat-ed.com/alabama](http://www.boat-ed.com/alabama).

After passing the online exam, you will be mailed a course certificate from the ALEA Marine Patrol. Take this certificate and personal identification to the Department of Public Safety Driver's License Examining Office in your county of residence to have the "V" class placed on your automobile driver's license. Or, if you do not have an automobile driver's license, you will be issued a "Vessel Only" license.

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

For state boating law information, call the ALEA Marine Patrol Division at **334-517-2950** or visit [www.alea.gov](http://www.alea.gov). For federal boating laws, visit the U.S. Coast Guard's boating safety website at: [www.uscg-boating.org](http://www.uscg-boating.org).

Information in this manual does not replace what is specifically legal for boating in Alabama, which is found in Alabama Code and federal laws.

## BOATING BASICS

### Before Going Out

Vessel Length Classes	2
Vessel Capacity	2
Fueling a Vessel	2
Additional Safety Procedures for PWCs	3
Filing a Float Plan	3
Pre-Departure Checklist	3

### On the Water

Encountering Other Vessels	4
Encountering Vessels With Limited Maneuverability	4
Navigation Rules	4
Nighttime Navigation	5
Encountering Vessels at Night	6
Encountering a Sailboat at Night	6
U.S. Aids to Navigation System	6
Lateral Markers	6
Non-Lateral Markers	8

Weather Emergencies	9
VHF Channels for Recreational Boaters	9
What To Do If Caught in Foul Weather	9
Other Boating Emergencies	10
Falling Overboard	10
Capsizing or Swamping	10
Hypothermia	10
Carbon Monoxide Poisoning	11
Preventing Theft	11

## IT'S THE LAW

### Boater Safety Certification

Age and Boater Certification Requirements for Operators	12
How To Obtain Boater Certification	14
Other Facts About Boater Certification	15

### Required Equipment

Personal Flotation Devices	16
Fire Extinguishers	17
Navigation Lights	18
Ventilation Systems	19
Backfire Flame Arrestors	19
Mufflers and Noise Level Limits	20
Sound-Producing Devices	20
Other Equipment	21

### On the Water

Unlawful and Dangerous Operation	22
Obstructing Navigation	23
Homeland Security Restrictions	23
Enforcement	23
Boating Accidents	24
Alcohol and Drugs	24
Disposal of Trash, Garbage, or Plastics	25

### Specifically for PWCs

Legal Requirements Specific to PWCs	26
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### Specifically for Skiing

Legal Requirements for Towing Skiers	27
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Before going out on the water, take steps to make the outing safe and enjoyable.

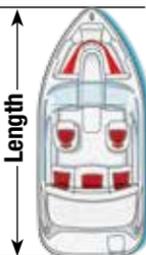
### Vessel Length Classes

- A vessel's length class dictates the equipment necessary to comply with federal and state laws.
- Vessels are divided into four length classes:
  - Less than 16 feet
  - 16 feet to less than 26 feet
  - 26 feet to less than 40 feet
  - 40 feet to less than 65 feet
- Length is measured from the tip of the bow in a straight line to the stern. This does not include outboard motors, brackets, rudders, bow attachments, or swim platforms and ladders that are not a molded part of the hull.

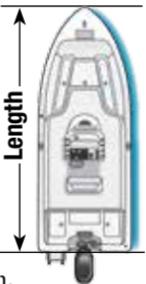
### Vessel Capacity

- Always check the capacity plate usually found near the operator's position or on the vessel's transom. This plate indicates the maximum weight capacity and maximum number of people that the vessel can carry safely.

Inboards



Outboards



- Personal watercraft (PWCs) and some other vessels do not have a capacity plate. Always follow the recommended capacity in the owner's manual and on the manufacturer's warning decal.

### Fueling a Vessel

Never fuel at night unless it is an emergency. If you must refuel after dark, use only electric lights. Try to refuel away from the water or on a commercial fueling ramp.

#### ■ Before beginning to fuel:

- Dock the boat securely and ask all passengers to exit.
- Do not allow anyone to smoke or strike a match.
- Check all fuel lines, connections, and fuel vents.
- Turn off anything that might cause a spark—engines, fans, or electrical equipment.
- Shut off all fuel valves and extinguish all open flames, such as galley stoves and pilot lights.
- Close all windows, ports, doors, and other openings to prevent fumes from entering the boat.
- Remove portable fuel tanks and fill them on the dock.

#### **The most important safe fueling practice ...**

If your vessel is equipped with a power ventilation system, turn it on for at least four minutes after fueling and before starting your engine to remove gas vapors.

### ■ While filling the fuel tank:

- Keep the nozzle of the fuel-pump hose in contact with the tank opening to prevent producing a static spark.
- Avoid spilling fuel into the boat's bilge or the water.
- Never fill a tank to the brim—leave room for gas to expand.

### ■ After fueling:

- Wipe up any spilled fuel.
- Open all windows, ports, doors, and other openings.

### Additional Safety Procedures for PWCs

- Do not tip the PWC in order to fill it all the way up. If the tank is overfilled, the fuel may expand and spill into the water.
- After fueling, open the door of the engine compartment and sniff to check for any evidence of gas fumes. Do this before starting the engine. If you do smell gas fumes, determine the source and make repairs immediately.

## Filing a Float Plan

Before going out on a vessel, it is always a good idea to leave a float plan with a relative or friend, or at least with a local marina. A float plan should:

- Describe the vessel, including its registration number, length, make, horsepower, and engine type.
- State where you are going, the detailed route, your planned departure time, and your expected return time.
- Give the name, address, and telephone number of each person on board and an emergency contact.

## Pre-Departure Checklist

You can help assure a good time while operating your vessel by performing this pre-departure check.

- ✓ Check the weather forecast for the area and timeframe during which you will be boating.
- ✓ Make sure that the steering and throttle controls operate properly and all lights are working properly.
- ✓ Check for any fuel leaks from the tank, fuel lines, and carburetor.
- ✓ Check the engine compartment for oil leaks.
- ✓ Check hose connections for leaks or cracks, and make sure hose clamps are tight.
- ✓ Drain all water from the engine compartment, and be sure the bilge plug is replaced and secure.
- ✓ Check to be sure you have a fully charged engine battery and fire extinguishers.
- ✓ If so equipped, make sure the ignition safety switch and wrist lanyard are in good order.
- ✓ Make sure you have the required number of personal flotation devices (PFDs), and check that they are in good condition.
- ✓ Leave a float plan with a reliable friend or relative.

Safe navigation on Alabama waterways is everyone's responsibility. All vessel operators are equally responsible for taking action necessary to avoid collisions.

### Encountering Other Vessels

Even though no vessel has the "right-of-way" over another vessel, there are some rules that every operator should follow when encountering other vessels. It is the responsibility of both operators to take the action needed to avoid a collision. The following shows what to do when encountering another vessel.

**To prevent collisions, every operator should follow the three basic rules of navigation.**

- Practice good seamanship.
- Keep a sharp lookout.
- Maintain a safe speed and distance.

### Encountering Vessels With Limited Maneuverability

- When operating a power-driven vessel, you must give way to:
  - Any vessel not under command, such as an anchored or disabled vessel
  - Any vessel restricted in its ability to maneuver, such as a vessel towing or laying cable, or a vessel constrained by its draft, such as a large ship in a channel

- A vessel engaged in commercial fishing
  - A sailboat under sail unless it is overtaking
- When operating a vessel under sail, you must give way to:
- Any vessel not under command
  - Any vessel restricted in its ability to maneuver
  - A vessel engaged in commercial fishing

### Navigation Rules

There are two terms that help explain these rules.

- **Stand-on vessel:** The vessel which should maintain its course and speed
- **Give-way vessel:** The vessel which must take early and substantial action to avoid collision by stopping, slowing down, or changing course



**Power vs. Power**

### Meeting Head-On

**Power vs. Power:** Neither vessel is the stand-on vessel. Both vessels should keep to the starboard (right).

**Power vs. Sail:** The powerboat is the give-way vessel. The sailboat is the stand-on vessel.



**Power vs. Sail**



Power vs. Power



Power vs. Power

### Crossing Situations

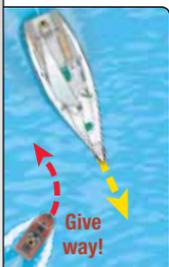
**Power vs. Power:** The vessel on the operator's port (left) side is the give-way vessel. The vessel on the operator's starboard (right) side is the stand-on vessel.

**Power vs. Sail:** The powerboat is the give-way vessel. The sailboat is the stand-on vessel.

### Overtaking

**Power vs. Power:** The vessel that is overtaking another vessel is the give-way vessel. The vessel being overtaken is the stand-on vessel.

**Power vs. Sail:** The vessel that is overtaking another vessel is the give-way vessel. The vessel being overtaken is the stand-on vessel.



Power vs. Sail



Power vs. Sail

## Nighttime Navigation

Be on the lookout for the lights of other vessels when boating at night. Several types of lights serve as navigational aids at night. There are four common navigation lights.

- **Sidelights:** These red and green lights are called sidelights (also called combination lights) because they are visible to another vessel approaching from the side or head-on. The red light indicates a vessel's port (left) side; the green indicates a vessel's starboard (right) side.
- **Sternlight:** This white light is seen from behind or nearly behind the vessel.
- **Masthead Light:** This white light shines forward and to both sides and is required on all power-driven vessels. A masthead light must be displayed by all vessels when under engine power. The absence of this light indicates a sailboat under sail.
- **All-Round White Light:** On power-driven vessels less than 39.4 feet in length, this light may be used to combine a masthead light and sternlight into a single white light that can be seen by other vessels from any direction. This light serves as an anchor light when sidelights are extinguished.

masthead light  
(225 degrees)



sidelights  
(combination)

sternlight

all-round white light  
(360 degrees)



sidelights  
(combination)

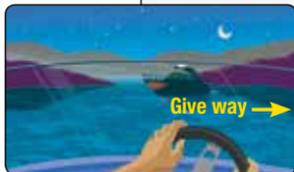
## Encountering Vessels at Night



When you see only a white light, you are overtaking another vessel. It is the stand-on vessel whether it is underway or anchored. You may go around it on either side.



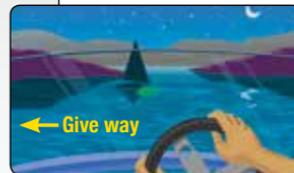
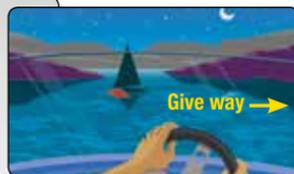
When you see a green and a white light, you are the stand-on vessel. However, remain alert in case the other vessel operator does not see you or does not know the navigation rules.



When you see a red and a white light, you must give way to the other vessel! Slow down and allow the vessel to pass, or you may turn to the right and pass behind the other vessel.

## Encountering a Sailboat at Night

When you see **only a red light or only a green light**, you are approaching a sailboat under sail and you must give way. The sailboat under sail is always the stand-on vessel!



## U.S. Aids to Navigation System (ATON)

Buoys and markers are the “traffic signals” that guide vessel operators safely along some waterways. They also identify dangerous or controlled areas and give directions and information. As a recreational boat or PWC operator, you will need to know the lateral navigation markers and non-lateral markers of the U.S. Aids to Navigation System.

### Lateral Markers

These navigation aids are used to mark the edges of safe water areas; for example, directing travel within a channel. The markers use a combination of colors and numbers, which may appear on either buoys or permanently placed markers.

**Red colors, red lights, and even numbers** indicate the right side of the channel as a boater enters from the open sea or heads upstream.



**Green colors, green lights, and odd numbers** indicate the left side of the channel as a boater enters from the open sea or heads upstream.



**Red and green colors and/or lights** indicate the preferred (primary) channel. If green is on top, the preferred channel is to the right as a boater enters from the open sea or heads upstream; if red is on top, the preferred channel is to the left.



**Nuns** are red cone-shaped buoys marked with even numbers.

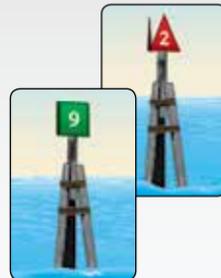


**Cans** are green cylindrical-shaped buoys marked with odd numbers.



**Lighted Buoys** use the lateral marker colors and numbers discussed above; in addition, they have a matching colored light.

**Daymarks** are permanently placed signs attached to structures, such as posts, in the water. Common daymarks are red triangles (equivalent to nuns) and green squares (equivalent to cans). They may be lighted also.



**Red Right Returning** is a reminder of the correct course when returning from open waters or heading upstream.

## Non-Lateral Markers

Non-lateral markers are navigational aids that give information about topics other than the edges of safe water areas. The most common are regulatory markers, as shown below, that are white and use orange markings and black lettering. These markers are found on lakes and rivers.

### Information

Squares indicate where to find food, supplies, repairs, etc. and give directions and other information.



### Controlled

Circles indicate a controlled area such as speed limit, no fishing or anchoring, ski only or no skiing, or "slow, no wake."



### Exclusion

Crossed diamonds indicate areas off-limits to all vessels such as swimming areas, dams, and spillways.



### Danger

Diamonds warn of dangers such as rocks, shoals, construction, dams, or stumps. Always proceed with caution.



## Other Non-Lateral Markers

**Safe Water Markers** are white with red vertical stripes and mark mid-channels or fairways. They may be passed on either side.



**Inland Waters Obstruction Markers** are white with black vertical stripes and indicate an obstruction to navigation. You should not pass between these buoys and the nearest shore.

## Mooring Buoy

Another kind of buoy you may encounter is the mooring buoy. These are white with a blue horizontal band. They are usually placed in marinas and other areas where vessels are allowed to anchor.



## Weather Emergencies

Weather can change very rapidly and create unexpected situations for vessel operators. Even meteorologists have trouble predicting rapid weather changes. You should always monitor weather developments. One way is to tune a VHF radio to the frequencies listed below.

### VHF Frequencies Broadcasting NOAA Weather Reports

162.400 MHz	162.450 MHz	162.500 MHz	162.550 MHz
162.425 MHz	162.475 MHz	162.525 MHz	

### VHF Channels for Recreational Boaters

- 6** .....Intership safety communications only
- 9** .....Communications between vessels (commercial and recreational), and ship to coast
- 13** .....Navigational use by commercial, military, and recreational vessels at bridges, locks, and harbors
- 16** .....Distress and safety calls to U.S. Coast Guard and others, and to initiate calls to other vessels
- 22** .....U.S. Coast Guard broadcasts of severe weather warnings, hazards to navigation, and other safety warnings
- 24-28** .....Public telephone calls (to marine operator)
- 68, 69, 71** ....Recreational vessel radio channels and ship to coast

## What To Do If Caught in Foul Weather

- Be sure your personal flotation device (life jacket) is properly secured on your body.
- If there is fog, sound your fog horn.
- Head for the nearest shore that is safe to approach.
- Head the bow into the waves at a 45-degree angle. PWCs should head into the waves at a 90-degree angle.
- Reduce speed.
- Seat passengers on the bottom of the vessel, as close to the centerline as possible.
- Minimize the danger of having your vessel struck by lightning by seeking shelter in advance of a storm. If caught on open water during a thunderstorm, stay low in the middle of the vessel.
- Secure loose items. Have emergency gear ready.
- Keep the bilge free of water.
- If the engine stops, drop a “sea anchor” on a line off the bow to keep the bow headed into the wind and reduce drifting while you ride out the storm. In an emergency, a bucket will work as a sea anchor.

## Other Boating Emergencies

A safe boater knows how to prevent and respond to other boating emergencies.

### Falling Overboard

#### ■ To prevent persons from falling overboard:

- Don't sit on the gunwale, bow, seat backs, motor cover, or any other area not designed for seating.
- Don't sit on pedestal seats when underway at greater than idle speed.
- Don't stand up in or lean out from the boat.
- Don't move about the boat when underway.

#### ■ If someone on your boat falls overboard:

- Reduce speed and toss the victim a throwable PFD.
- Turn your boat around and slowly pull alongside the victim, approaching the victim from downwind or into the current, whichever is stronger.
- Turn off the engine. Pull the victim on board over the stern, keeping the weight in the boat balanced.

### Capsizing or Swamping

#### ■ To reduce the risk of capsizing or swamping:

- Don't overload your boat. Balance the load.
- Slow your boat appropriately when turning.
- Secure the anchor line to the bow, never to the stern.
- Don't boat in rough water or in bad weather.

#### ■ If you capsize or swamp your boat, or if you have fallen overboard and can't get back in:

- Stay with the boat.
- Try to reboard or climb onto it in order to get as much of your body out of the cold water as possible.

#### ■ If the boat sinks or floats away, don't panic.

- If wearing a PFD, remain calm and await help.
- If you aren't wearing a PFD, look around for one or for other buoyant items to use as a flotation device.
- In cold water, float rather than tread.

### Hypothermia

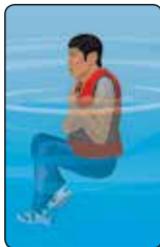
#### ■ If you are boating in cold water:

- Dress in several layers of clothing under your PFD or wear a wetsuit or drysuit.
- Learn to recognize the symptoms of hypothermia. Symptoms begin with shivering and bluish lips and nails, and progress to a coma and, ultimately, death.

#### ■ To reduce the effects of hypothermia:

- Put on a PFD if not wearing one. It helps you to float without excessive movement and insulates your body.
- Get as much of your body out of the water as possible.
- Don't take your clothes off unless necessary—clothes can help you float and provide insulation.
- Don't thrash or move about. Excess motion consumes energy and increases loss of body heat.

- Draw your knees to your chest and your arms to your sides, protecting the major areas of heat loss.
- If others are in the water with you, huddle together with your arms around their shoulders.



## Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide is an invisible, odorless, tasteless gas that can be deadly. To prevent carbon monoxide poisoning, keep air flowing through the boat and take extreme caution when running a generator at a dock or at anchor.

- Whenever people are using a swim platform or are in the water close to the stern, turn off all gasoline-powered generators with transom exhaust ports.
- Swimmers should never enter the cavity between the swim platform and the stern of the boat.
- When boating, be careful running downwind as exhaust gases may blow back on board. On cabin cruisers, be aware that exhaust gases can blow back into the stern when traveling into the wind.



## Preventing Theft

Defend against theft of your vessel and equipment.

- Store your vessel so that it is not easily accessed.
  - Store your vessel and trailer in a locked garage or storage area.
  - Park another vehicle in front of the trailer, or lock the trailer to a fixed object in a well-lighted area.
  - Secure the vessel and trailer to a fixed object with a good quality chain and lock. If moored, secure the vessel to the dock with a steel cable and lock.
  - Remove a trailer wheel if parked for an extended time.
  - Purchase a quality trailer hitch lock and use it.
- Chain and lock the motor and fuel tanks to the vessel.
- Mark or engrave all equipment with an identifier such as your driver's license number.
- Photograph or videotape the interior and exterior of your vessel, showing all installed equipment and additional gear and equipment. Make a complete inventory of your equipment, vessel, and trailer.
- Remove expensive electronics or other valuables if the vessel is left unattended.
- Cover your vessel and always remove the keys.
- Title and register your vessel.

# Boater Safety Certification

LAW

## Age and Boater Certification Requirements for Operators

The Roberson/Archer Act of 1994 requires that every person who operates a motorized vessel (including PWCs) on the waters of Alabama must first obtain an Alabama boater safety certification. This requirement does not apply to operators of sailboats, rowboats, or canoes.

### Age To Operate Legally on Alabama Waters

- No one under the age of 12 years may operate any motorized vessel (including PWCs) under any circumstances.
- Persons under the age of 12 years are not eligible for Alabama boater safety certification.

### Certification Requirements for Alabama Residents

- **If you are under 12 years of age:** You may *not* obtain your Alabama boater safety certification, and you may *not* operate a vessel under any circumstances.
- **If you are 12 or 13 years of age:** You may obtain your Alabama boater safety certification. After obtaining the certification, you may operate a vessel legally *only if* supervised on board by a person who:
  - Is at least 21 years of age *and ...*
  - Carries a valid proof of his or her Alabama boater safety certification *and ...*
  - Is in position to take immediate physical control of the vessel.

- **If you are 14 years of age or older:** After obtaining Alabama boater safety certification, you may operate a vessel without supervision legally.

### Certification Requirements for Residents of Other States

- **If you are under 12 years of age:** You may *not* obtain your Alabama boater safety certification, and you may *not* operate a vessel under any circumstances.
- **If you are 12 or 13 years of age:** You may operate a vessel on Alabama waters *only if* supervised on board by a person who:
  - Is at least 21 years of age *and ...*
  - Carries a valid proof of his or her Alabama boater safety certification (unless the supervising person is also a non-resident in which case he or she is not required to have Alabama boater safety certification) *and ...*
  - Is in position to take immediate physical control of the vessel.
- **If you are 14 years of age or older:** You may legally operate a motorized vessel legally on Alabama waters for up to 45 days per calendar year without supervision. After 45 days, you must have a valid proof of boater safety certification (either Alabama non-resident certification or certification from your home state).

## Persons Exempt from Certification

Some persons may operate a motorized vessel on Alabama waters without first obtaining Alabama boater safety certification.

- Operators of commercial fishing vessels or who are engaged in other valid commercial activity are not required to obtain boater safety certification.
- Persons taking test drives of vessels for sale and accompanied by a licensed vessel dealer are not required to obtain boater safety certification.
- A person may operate a rented vessel without boater safety certification if:
  - He or she has been instructed in safe and proper operation of the vessel by the rental business *and* ...
  - He or she is not currently under suspension or revocation of any boater certification or vessel operation privilege.
- Temporary exemptions exist for boater safety certification:
  - A new owner of a vessel may operate without boater certification for 30 days from the date of sale providing the vessel is registered in his or her name and a bill of sale is on board naming him or her as the purchaser.
- Every new resident of the State of Alabama may operate without boater safety certification for a period of 30 days after establishing residence in this state.

## Persons Who May Not Be Issued Certification

Alabama boater safety certification may not be issued to:

- Persons under the age of 12 years
- Persons whose vessel operating right or privilege is suspended or revoked
- Persons who are habitual abusers of alcohol or drugs
- Persons afflicted with or suffering from a physical or mental disability which, in the opinion of the Director of Public Safety or examining officer, will prevent the person from exercising reasonable and ordinary control over a vessel

## Requirement To Display Certification

If you are required to have boater safety certification, you must carry proof of your Alabama boater safety certification on board when operating a power-driven vessel and make it available upon request to any person with law enforcement authority.

**Keep in mind ...** As the owner of a vessel, it is illegal for you to knowingly allow operation of your vessel by others in violation of the laws of Alabama. This includes allowing operation of your vessel by children under the age of 12 years or by others not holding a valid boater certification.

## How To Obtain Boater Certification

If you are 12 years of age or older, you may obtain Alabama boater safety certification by doing the following:

1. Go to a Department of Public Safety Driver's License Examining Office in your county of residence.
2. Fill out the application form and pay the Certification Application Fee.
3. Receive a certification of examination by passing a written exam based on material from this manual—questions on navigation rules, laws, safety equipment, and the waterways marking system.

**or ...**

Receive a certification of examination exemption by presenting any one of the following:

- A valid course completion certificate obtained by passing a boating safety course:
  - Offered by the U.S. Power Squadrons or by the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary **or ...**
  - Approved by the ALEA Marine Patrol Division
- A valid U.S. Coast Guard Motorboat Operator's License
- Proof that you were 40 years old or older as of April 28, 1994

4. Present your certification of examination or certification of examination exemption to the Department of Public Safety Driver's License Examining Office in your county of residence. You also must provide identification to the license examiner. Identification may consist of, but is not limited to, one of the following: birth certificate—original or certified copy (**required**

- for juvenile**); certified school record (**required for juvenile**); marriage license; original Social Security card (**required for juvenile and non-residents**); passport; military identification; I-94; valid Alabama or out-of-state driver's license; DD 214; or resident alien papers.
5. Pay the boater safety certification fee if applying other than at the time of your automobile driver's license, learner's license, or non-driver I.D. renewal.

### Boater Certification Fees

Certification Application Fee (for examination or examination exemption) CASH ONLY . . . . .	\$5.00
Boater Safety Certification (done at the same time as issuance of driver's license or learner's license) . . . . .	N/C
Boater Safety Certification (other than at the time of driver's license, learner's license, or non-driver I.D. renewal). . . . .	\$23.50
Duplicate Certification, first and subsequent duplicate (lost or destroyed) . . . . .	\$18.50
Duplicate (otherwise) . . . . .	Cost of original
Reinstatement after revocation or suspension . . . . .	\$50.00

License fees shown above are subject to change and will be slightly higher in counties where local legislation permits a higher fee.

6. Your Alabama boater safety certification will appear as a "V" class placed on your automobile driver's license. Or, if you do not have an automobile driver's license, you will be issued a "Vessel Only" license. This is proof of your certification.

## Other Facts About Boater Certification

- **Renewing boater certification:** Your Alabama boater safety certification will be renewed at no charge every four years when your Alabama automobile driver's license is renewed, unless your boater certification has been suspended or revoked at the time of renewal.
- **Lost, destroyed, or damaged certifications:** If your proof of certification is lost or destroyed or becomes illegible, but has not yet expired, you should apply for a duplicate at the probate judge or license commissioner's office. No examination is necessary, but proof of identity is required.
  - Any person making a false affidavit in obtaining a duplicate proof of certification is guilty of a Class C misdemeanor and will be punished accordingly by a fine or imprisonment, or both.
  - In addition, any person who, on any application for certification or renewal, willfully makes a false statement or conceals or withholds a material fact may be prosecuted for perjury or fraud, respectively.
- **Alabama boater safety certification cancellation, revocation, or suspension:** Your Alabama boater safety certification may be cancelled, suspended, or revoked if you operate a vessel while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, operate in a reckless or careless manner, or on points. The point system has been instituted as a means of identifying the problem vessel operator. This system will be established and maintained by the ALEA Marine Patrol Division through regulations. Any person whose certification has been cancelled, suspended, or revoked must pay a \$50.00 reinstatement

fee in addition to meeting other requirements of the state law before recertification.

- **Cancellation:** The Chief of ALEA Marine Patrol Division is authorized to cancel any Alabama boater safety certification upon determining that a person was not entitled to the certification. Failure to give required or correct information on an application is also grounds for cancellation.
- **Revocation:** Alabama boater safety certification may be revoked if an operator is convicted of certain offenses. After the period of revocation has expired, the operator may apply for new certification and will be required to take and pass the examination.
- **Suspension:** Alabama boater safety certification may be suspended if an operator is convicted of certain offenses or is determined to be incompetent to operate a vessel. After the period of suspension, the certification may be reinstated unless all the requirements of the suspension were not met.
- **Reinstatement:** The operator must pay the reinstatement fee and obtain a duplicate proof of certification regardless of whether it is expired or not.

# Required Equipment

LAW

When preparing to go out on a vessel, the operator must check that the legally required equipment is on board.

## Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs)

- All vessels must carry one U.S. Coast Guard–approved Type I, II, III, or V PFD for each person on board or being towed. If a Type V PFD is used, it must be approved for the activity at hand.
- One U.S. Coast Guard–approved Type IV PFD must be on board vessels 16 feet long or longer, in addition to the requirement above.
- Children under 8 years of age must *wear* a properly secured U.S. Coast Guard–approved PFD at all times while on board any vessel, except when in an enclosed cabin.
- Every person on board a PWC or being towed behind a vessel must *wear* a properly secured U.S. Coast Guard–approved PFD.
- Each person on board a vessel within 800 feet below a hydro-electric dam and/or navigational lock and dam must *wear* a U.S. Coast Guard–approved Type I, II, III, or V PFD.
- Besides being USCG–approved, all PFDs must be:
  - *In good and serviceable condition.*
  - *Readily accessible*, which means you are able to put the PFD on quickly in an emergency.
  - *Of the proper size for the intended wearer.* Sizing for PFDs is based on body weight and chest size.



### TYPE I: Offshore Life Jackets

These vests are geared for rough or remote waters where rescue may take a while. 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 rescue is likely. A Type II may not turn some unconscious wearers face up in the water.

### TYPE III: Flotation Aids

These vests or full-sleeved jackets are good for calm waters when quick rescue is likely. They are not recommended for rough waters since they will not turn most unconscious persons face up.



### TYPE IV: Throwable Devices

These cushions and ring buoys are designed to be thrown to someone in trouble. Since a Type IV 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 Device

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

## Fire Extinguishers

- All vessels are required to have a Type B U.S. Coast Guard-approved fire extinguisher(s) on board if one or more of the following conditions exist:
  - Inboard or inboard/outboard engines
  - Closed compartments under seats where portable fuel tanks may be stored
  - Permanently installed fuel tanks
  - Closed or semi-closed living spaces
  - Devices on board that consume petroleum products (e.g., stoves, lanterns)

- 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.
- 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, and inspect extinguishers regularly to ensure they are in working condition and fully charged.

Use this chart to determine the size and quantity required for your vessel.

### Fire Extinguisher Requirements

Classification type & size	Foam minimum gallons	Carbon Dioxide minimum pounds	Dry Chemical minimum pounds
B-I	1¼	4	2
B-II	2½	15	10
Length of Vessel	Without Fixed System	With Fixed System*	
Less than 26 ft.	one B-I	None	
26 ft. to less than 40 ft.	two B-I <b>or</b> one B-II	one B-I	
40 ft. to less than 65 ft.	three B-I <b>or</b> one B-II and one B-I	two B-I <b>or</b> one B-II	

\* refers to a permanently installed fire extinguisher system

## Navigation Lights

The required navigation lights must be displayed between sunset and sunrise and during periods of restricted visibility such as fog or heavy rain. For requirements for larger vessels, see the U.S. Coast Guard's *Navigation Rules*.

### Power-Driven Vessels 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 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 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 higher than the sidelights.

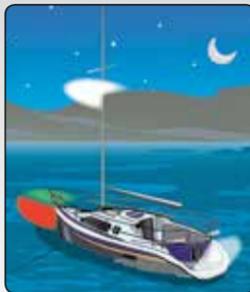
### Unpowered Vessels When Underway

Unpowered vessels are sailboats or vessels that are paddled, poled, or rowed.

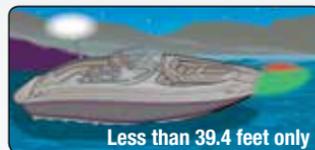
- **If less than 65.6 feet** (20 meters) long, these vessels must exhibit the lights as shown in illustration 2. The required lights are:
  - Red and green sidelights visible from at least two miles away—or if less than 39.4 feet long, at least one mile away.
  - A sternlight visible from at least two 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, must have on hand at least one lantern or flashlight shining a white light as shown in illustration 3.

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



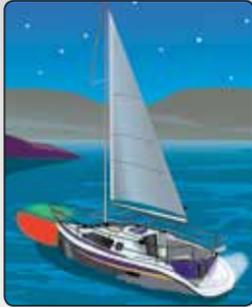
The masthead light and sternlight may be combined as an all-round white light on vessels less than 39.4 feet long.



## 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.

### 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 23.0 Feet



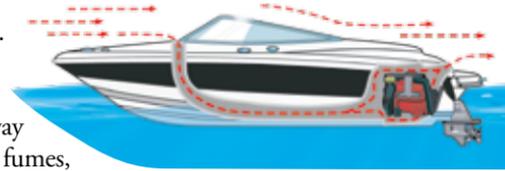
Vessel operators should never leave shore without a flashlight. Even if you plan to return before dark, unforeseen developments might delay your return past nightfall.



## Ventilation Systems

The purpose of ventilation systems 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.
- If your vessel is equipped with a power ventilation system, turn it on for at least four minutes both after fueling and before starting your 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.



## Backfire Flame Arrestors

- Because vessel engines may backfire, all power-driven vessels (except outboards) that are fueled with gasoline must have a U.S. Coast Guard-approved (comply with SAE J-1928 or UL 1111 standards) backfire flame arrestor on each carburetor.
- Periodically clean the flame arrestor(s) and check for any damage.

## Mufflers and Noise Level Limits

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

- A vessel's engine must have a muffler or exhaust water manifold for noise reduction or another effective muffling system.
- The use of cut-outs or exhaust stacks is prohibited.
- It is illegal to operate a powerboat or PWC, or allow others to operate it, in such a manner that the noise level exceeds 86 decibels measured at 50 feet from the vessel. You must submit to a noise level test if requested by a law enforcement officer.
- It is illegal for recreational boaters to use or have on board a siren of any type while operating on the waters of Alabama.

## Sound-Producing Devices

- These requirements for sound-producing devices apply to vessels operating on Alabama state waters.
  - Vessels less than 16 feet long are not required to have a sound-producing device, but it is *strongly recommended* that these vessels carry a horn or whistle on board.
  - Vessels 16 feet to 26 feet long 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 26 feet to 40 feet long 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 mile.

- These requirements for sound-producing devices 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.

Some sound signals that you should be familiar with are as follows.

### 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 sailboats under sail.

### Warning

- ***One prolonged blast*** is a warning signal (for example, 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.

## Federally Controlled Waters

Vessels must observe federal requirements on these waters:

- Coastal waters
- The Great Lakes
- Territorial seas
- Waters which are two miles wide or wider and are connected directly to one of the above

## Other Equipment

### Ignition Safety Switch

- An emergency ignition safety switch is designed to shut off the engine if the operator is thrown from the proper operating position.
- A lanyard is attached to the safety switch and the operator's wrist or PFD. The safety switch shuts off the engine if the operator falls off the PWC or out of the powerboat. If your vessel does not come equipped with an ignition safety switch, you should have one installed.
- Alabama law requires that vessels that are less than 24 feet in length, have an open cockpit, and are powered by more than 50 horsepower be equipped with an ignition safety switch. The lanyard of the switch must be attached to the person, clothing, or PFD of the operator.



## Diver-Down Flags

- Federal and state law requires that scuba divers and snorkelers display a diver-down flag to mark the diving area. Alabama law requires that vessel operators stay at least 100 feet away from a displayed flag.
- Two types of flags are used to indicate diving activity.



**Divers Flag**



**Alfa Flag**

A rectangular red flag, at least 12 x 12 inches, with a white diagonal stripe is used to indicate the presence of a submerged diver in the area. Alabama law requires that divers prominently display this flag and stay within a 50-foot radius of the flag.

A blue and white flag, at least 3.3 feet (1 meter) high and visible from all directions, must be displayed on vessels on federally controlled waters whenever these vessels are restricted in their ability to maneuver by the diving operation.

# On the Water

LAW

In addition to the laws mentioned previously, here are some other Alabama regulations that apply when vessel operators are on the water.

## Unlawful and Dangerous Operation

Alabama law designates certain dangerous operating practices as illegal. Examples of illegal and dangerous operation follow.

- **Reckless Operation** of a vessel, or reckless manipulation of water skis or similar devices, is the failure to exercise the care necessary to protect the life, safety, or property of others. Some examples of reckless operation are:
  - Operating in violation of the navigation rules described on pages 4-6
  - Jumping the wake of another vessel unnecessarily close to that vessel, or encircling or buzzing another vessel or person in the water
  - Operating within 100 feet of a diver-down flag (see page 21)
  - Weaving your vessel through congested waterway traffic or swerving at the last possible moment in order to avoid a collision
- **Careless Operation** of a vessel is operating in a negligent, careless, or inattentive manner that endangers the life, safety, or property of others. Some examples of careless operation are:
  - Operating a vessel not equipped with the required safety equipment
  - Failing to maintain a proper lookout for other vessels or persons in the water

- **Failure To Regulate Speed** is operating at speeds greater than that which allows the operator to bring the vessel to a stop within a clear distance ahead, or at speeds which cause danger or inconvenience to others given the existing weather and traffic conditions. A vessel operator must not:
  - Operate at a speed which causes a hazardous wake or wash when approaching another vessel or when entering or leaving a marina or harbor area.
  - Operate above a “**plane speed**” when persons or gear on board the vessel are such that the operator’s view is obstructed or safe operation is impaired.
  - Exceed any posted speed limitations such as “**idle speed**” or “**slow, no wake speed**” areas or any other speed zones.
- **Overloading or Overpowering** is loading the vessel with passengers or gear beyond the recommended capacity shown on the capacity plate (taking into consideration weather and existing conditions) or powering a vessel beyond the recommended horsepower shown on the capacity plate. It is illegal to operate, or allow others to operate, a vessel without a permanent capacity plate.
- **Riding on the Bow, Deck, or Gunwale** is allowing passengers to ride on the bow, gunwale, transom, seat backs, seats on raised decks, or any other place where there may be a chance of falling overboard.

“**Plane Speed**” means the slowest speed at which it is still possible to keep the vessel on plane.

“**Idle Speed**” or “**Slow, No Wake Speed**” means the slowest speed at which it is possible to maintain steering, not to exceed 5 mph.

## Obstructing Navigation

It is illegal to:

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

- 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 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 channels.
- Keep a sharp eye out for anything that looks peculiar or out of the ordinary and report it to the closest authority.

## Enforcement

- The boating laws of Alabama are enforced by Marine Patrol troopers, county sheriffs, U.S. Coast Guard officers, and any other authorized peace officer or law enforcement officer.
- They have the authority to stop and board vessels in order to check for compliance with state and federal laws. The U.S. Coast Guard also has enforcement authority on all federally controlled waters.
- Whenever you are contacted by one of these officers, you must stop and permit the officer to come alongside to check your vessel registration and required safety equipment.

## Boating Accidents

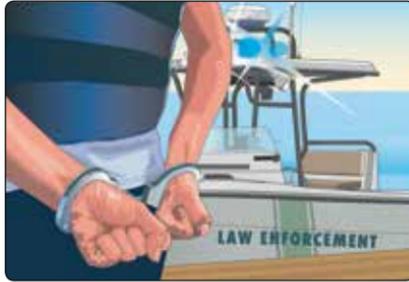
- An operator involved in a boating accident must:
  - Stop his or her vessel *immediately* at the scene of the accident *and ...*
  - Assist anyone injured or in danger from the accident, unless doing so would seriously endanger his or her own vessel or passengers *and ...*
  - Give, in writing, his 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 involved in an accident must submit a written report to the ALEA Marine Patrol Division if as a result of the accident:
  - A person dies or disappears *or ...*
  - A person is injured and remains incapacitated for more than 72 hours *or ...*
  - Damage to the vessel and other property exceeds \$2,000.
- Reports of accidents must be made within 10 days of the accident on the forms provided by Marine Patrol troopers, the Marine Patrol Division, or county sheriff's offices.
- A uniformed Marine Patrol trooper, county sheriff, or other authorized enforcement officer may arrest, at the scene of the accident, any person they reasonably believe contributed to the accident.
- A person who unlawfully and unintentionally causes the death of another person, while engaged in violation of any boating law or regulation, will be guilty of homicide.

## Alcohol and Drugs

Alabama law prohibits anyone from boating under the influence (BUI)—that is, operating any boat, sailboat, personal watercraft, water skis, sailboard, or similar device while intoxicated due to alcohol or any combination of alcohol, controlled substances, or drugs. 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.

- Alabama law specifically states that it is illegal to be in physical control of any vessel, water skis, or similar device if the operator:
  - Has a concentration of alcohol in his or her blood of 0.08% or more.
  - Is under the influence of:
    - Alcohol, any controlled substance, or drugs *or ...*
    - Any combination of alcohol, controlled substances, or drugs *or ...*
    - Any substance which impairs the operator's mental or physical faculties.
- Alabama law establishes the following penalties for those arrested and convicted of boating under the influence:
  - On the first offense, a fine of up to \$2,100 and/or sentence of one year in jail, and suspension of his or her operator's certification for 90 days
  - On the second offense, a fine of up to \$5,100 and/or sentence of up to one year in jail with a mandatory sentence of not less than 5 days or community service for not less than 30 days, and suspension of his or her operator's certification for one year

- On the third offense, a fine of up to \$10,100 and/or sentence of up to one year in jail with a mandatory sentence of not less than 60 days, and suspension of his or her operator's certification for three years
- If it is believed that a person who operates a vessel on the waters of Alabama is boating under the influence of alcohol or any other controlled substance, he or she must submit to a field breath test or any other approved testing for blood alcohol concentration. Refusal to submit to a field breath test, or other approved testing device, will result in the same punishment as provided in Alabama law for operators of motor vehicles on state highways.



Just remember this simple rule:  
***Don't Drink and Boat!***

## Disposal of Trash, Garbage, or Plastics

It is illegal to dump trash, garbage, or plastics into any state waters.

- You must store trash, garbage, and plastics in a container or storage compartment while on board and place these items in a proper receptacle after returning to shore.
- The container or storage compartment on the vessel must be designed so that trash, garbage, and plastics cannot be blown overboard accidentally.
- You must have a container or bag on the vessel that can be used to take trash, garbage, and plastics to shore for legal disposal.

### Marine Sanitation Act

The Marine Sanitation Act 2002-59 (Clean Boating Bill):

- Prohibits vessels with a Type III marine sanitation device from docking, storing, anchoring, or mooring at a marina that does not have a pump-out or approved waste disposal system (except in emergency situations).
- Requires the inspection of marine sanitation devices on both recreational and residence vessels and the issuing of yearly inspection decals by an officer of the ALEA Marine Patrol Division.
- Charges the officers of the ALEA Marine Patrol Division with enforcing the Marine Sanitation Act as it pertains to the regulation of boat sewage discharges.

# Specifically for PWCs

LAW

Personal watercraft (PWC) operators must obey the laws that apply to other vessels as well as obey additional requirements that apply specifically to the operation of personal watercraft.

## Legal Requirements Specific to PWCs

- Each person on board a PWC must *wear* a properly secured U.S. Coast Guard–approved PFD.
- PWCs must either be equipped with an ignition safety switch or have a self-circling feature if the operator falls off. If the PWC is equipped with an ignition safety switch, the lanyard must be attached to the person, clothing, or PFD of the operator.
- PWC operators are subject to the age restrictions and boater safety certification requirements on pages 12-15.
- PWCs must be operated in a reasonable and prudent manner. It is illegal to operate a PWC in a way that endangers the life, limb, or property of others. Specifically, it is against the law to:
  - Weave your PWC through congested waterway traffic at high speed.



- Follow closely behind and within the wake of a vessel towing a person on water skis or other similar devices.
  - Cut between a vessel and the person(s) being towed by that vessel.
  - Jump the wake of another vessel unnecessarily close to that vessel.
  - Encircle or buzz another vessel or person in the water.
  - Cross the path of another vessel at right angles while close to the stern of the other vessel or when visibility around the other vessel is obstructed.
  - Swerve at the last possible moment to avoid a collision.
  - Chase, harass, or disturb wildlife or birds with your PWC.
- It is *strongly recommended* that PWCs be operated during daylight hours only. If a PWC is operated at night, it must display the required navigation lights.

**Keep in mind ...** As the owner of a PWC, you are legally responsible if you authorize or knowingly permit the PWC to be operated in violation of Alabama law.

# Specifically for Skiing

LAW

Vessel operators towing a person(s) on water skis, a surfboard, or a similar device have additional laws they must follow.

## Legal Requirements for Towing Skiers

- It is illegal for vessels to tow person(s) on water skis, an aquaplane, or a similar device between one hour after sunset and one hour before sunrise.
- Each person being towed behind a vessel on water skis or similar devices must *wear* a properly secured U.S. Coast Guard–approved Type I, II, III, or V PFD. Ski belts are not U.S. Coast Guard–approved. It is the legal responsibility of the owner of the towing vessel to enforce this requirement.
- Every vessel (except personal watercraft) towing a person(s) on water skis or similar device must have:
  - A capable observer, other than the operator, 12 years of age or older *or* ...
  - A wide-angle rearview mirror. The size of the mirror must be at least 78 square inches and have a field of vision of at least 170 degrees.

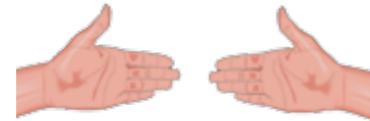


- Every PWC towing a person(s) on water skis or a similar device must have mirrors mounted on both the right and left sides of the PWC (but not attached to the steering control) and the mirrors must be at least 2½ inches high by 4 inches wide.
- The vessel operator must maintain reasonable distance from other vessels, people, and property to avoid endangering life or property. It is illegal to tow a person on water skis or similar devices behind your vessel, or to manipulate the water skis or similar devices, in a manner that causes the towed person to collide with another person or object.

## Hand Signals for Skiers

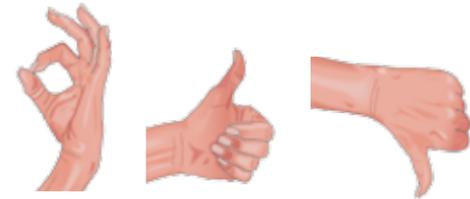


Stop



Turn left

Turn right



Speed OK

Speed up

Slow down

**LEARN JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING YOU WANT TO KNOW  
ABOUT WHAT IS GOING ON OUTDOORS IN ALABAMA!**

# **ALEA MARINE PATROL DIVISION**



VISIT US ON OUR WEBSITE AT:  
**[www.alea.gov](http://www.alea.gov)**



## **DISTRICT OFFICES**

- **NORTHERN DIVISION**  
1830 Constellation Avenue  
Alpine, AL 35014  
256-268-2570  
1-800-499-1667
- **CENTRAL DIVISION**  
126 Marina Road  
Alexander City, AL 35010  
256-329-2268  
1-800-432-7389
- **SOUTHERN DIVISION**  
27557 Larry C. Kelley Lane  
Orange Beach, AL 36561  
251-981-2673  
1-888-903-2583
- **MARINE PATROL HEADQUARTERS**  
301 South Ripley Street  
6th Floor  
Montgomery, AL 36130  
334-517-2950  
1-800-272-7930