

Pleasure Boater FAQ:

Do I need a license to operate a recreational boat in Pennsylvania?

- https://www.boat-ed.com/pennsylvania/boating_law.html

-Regardless of your age, you need education if you will be operating a powered water craft (PWC) in Pennsylvania. You also need education if you were born on or after Jan. 1, 1982, and will be operating a boat over 25HP in PA. There is no minimum age requirement to take this online course, nor do you to be a resident of Pennsylvania to take it.

-Vessel operators who are required to have a Boater Education Card must carry the card on board the vessel and have it available for inspection by an enforcement officer.

-The Pennsylvania Boating Safety Education Certificate is proof that you have successfully completed all of the components of an approved Boating safety course and allows you to go boating. Because the Boating education card or certificate does not expire and does not need to be renewed, it is not called the Pennsylvania Boating License. Even if not required by law to get the Pennsylvania boating education card, many boaters take the boat safety course in order to save on their PWC or boat insurance.

What agencies govern authority over the waterways? Who is enforcing the laws?

-United States Coast Guard; PA Fish and Boat Commission, City of Pittsburgh River Rescue

Who creates the laws governing the inland waterways? Where do they come from?

-The *International Regulations for the Prevention of Collision at Sea* (COLREGS) are the “Rules of the Road” on the water, and are almost identical to the United States Inland rules. These rules apply to all boats of any size on almost any navigable body of water in the U.S. The USCG provides an online collection of US Federal Navigation Regulations, here:

<https://www.navcen.uscg.gov/?pageName=regContent>

-The National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) works to develop public policy for boating safety in all 50 states. Their website provides a Reference Guide to State Boating Laws, here: <http://www.nasbla.org/nasblamain/nasbla-resources/state-boating-laws>

Who has the “Right of Way” on the river, tow boats, powered pleasure craft, non-powered pleasure craft (sail boats, kayaks, canoes, etc.)?

-There is a pretty standard pecking order spelled out in the Power Squadron book: *The One-Minute Guide to the Nautical Rules of the Road*:

Restricted Ability to Maneuver>

Engaged in Fishing (This pertains to commercial fishing vessels, only. Recreational fishing from recreational boats is not included under this classification) >

Sailing>

Power Driven.

This metric pertains to “open water” conditions.

-When navigating on the Western Rivers, or “Narrow Channels,” the book summarizes that “human-powered vessels should, whenever possible, stay out of channels used by larger

vessels... [and that] the vessel having greater ability to avoid collision under the circumstances is generally charged with keeping clear.”

What is a channel line? Where is the best place to travel on the river?

-The “channel line” is the recommended sailing line for all vessels on the river, and can be found in river navigation charts provided by the US Army Corps of Engineers. These lines provide the safest route for vessels to avoid structures and potentially causing damage to river banks and boats. Most commercial boats (towboats with barges in tow) follow the channel line when underway. Recreational boats that do not draft a lot of water are not specifically confined to the channel line when travelling. When travelling, however, it is recommended that recreational boats stay closer to the starboard side of the channel, similar to driving on the right side of the road.

Can I pass (overtake) a tow boat?

-In short: yes. Most recreational boats can safely travel faster than a towboat with tow (barges), and have the ability to overtake or pass that towboat. Because the towboat is travelling slower and is limited in her ability to maneuver, the towboat has the right of way and the recreational boat is responsible for staying out of the way of the towboat when overtaking.

-It is recommended that overtaking not take place in a bend or constricted or severely congested area. Also, whenever possible, recreational boats can communicate with towboats via VHF radio to determine if overtaking is possible and/or safe.

Should I have a VHF radio on my boat? Why?

-It is never a bad idea to keep a VHF radio on your boat. VHF radios provide a way to communicate with other boats regarding safe navigation and emergency situations. Most commercial boats communicate on CH13 and the US Coast Guard monitors CH16.

Can pleasure craft use the locks?/What is the best way to contact the locks in order to lock through?

-Pleasure craft can use the lock systems. The best way to communicate with the locks is to call them on a VHF radio on CH13. Be specific when calling, identifying your boat and your location in relation to the lock – specifically the direction you are heading: “This is the 35 foot recreational boat that is down-bound above you.”

-If you do not have a VHF radio, there is a pull-cord in the last ladder well on the land-wall of the lock. This cord notifies the lock that you would like to pass through.

-The lock phone numbers are also provided on the US Army Corps of Engineers website. You can call when you are getting close and make arrangements to lock through.

<http://www.lrp.usace.army.mil/Missions/Navigation/Locks-and-Dams/>

Where’s the best place to anchor my boat?

-When anchoring, do not anchor on or near the channel line, or in a bend. Take your boat as close to the bank as is safely possible, so as not to impede any river traffic.

-The US Army Corps of Engineers states on their website: “The district would like to remind recreational boaters that anchoring inside the navigational channel is prohibited and poses a

great hazard to navigation. Commercial vessels frequently require large portions of the channel to maneuver. Additionally, they need several hundred feet to stop to avoid a collision.”

What is a PFD and when do I need to wear one?

-A personal flotation device (PFD) can be a life jacket, life preserver, or life vest. There are many different types of PFDs, but ultimately, they are all designed to keep you afloat in the water.

-So who has to wear a PFD? According to the PA Fish and Boat Commission: all children under 12 aboard any boat 20 feet in length or less; anyone being towed behind a boat, i.e., water skiing, tubing, and wakeboarding; anyone aboard a personal watercraft; anyone aboard a boat 16 feet in length or less.

-More detailed information about PFDs can be found at:

<http://www.fishandboat.com/Boat/BoatingRegulations/Documents/brochure.pdf>

When pulling a water skier, do I need to have a lookout?

-Boaters must have a lookout when pulling a water skier. A mirror will not suffice, nor is one required. Skiers may run between sunrise and sunset in PA.

Who do I call if I have an emergency?

-The US Coast Guard can be reached on Channel 16 on a VHF radio, or at 1-800-253-7465.

-911

What do the different colored buoys on the river mean?

-The red and green buoys found on the river are aids to navigation. When travelling downstream, the green “can” buoys will be on the starboard side of the boat, and the red “nun” buoys will be on the port side. These buoys mark any shallow or obstructed areas outside of the channel line that could pose a hazard to navigation. It is important to not position your boat between these buoys and their respective banks; e.g., do not get between the green buoy and the right bank when heading downriver.

-Other buoys you should be aware of are “Danger”, “No Wake”, and “Keep Out”.

-The US Coast Guard has a document describing several different aids to navigation, here:

<https://www.uscgboating.org/images/486.PDF>

What rules apply kayaks, canoes, and other “human-powered” vessels?

- The Power Squadron book: *The One-Minute Guide to the Nautical Rules of the Road*:, explains that all “human-powered vessels must observe the general rules of responsibility, maintaining a lookout, not exceeding a safe speed, determining risk of collision, and taking proper action to avoid collision.” The book goes on to explain that “human-powered vessels should, whenever possible, stay out of channels used by large vessels.”

-Ultimately, both human-powered, and motor-driven vessels, have the right to transit our waterways. But it is the responsibility of everyone to do everything in their power to avoid collision.

Am I responsible for the wake created by my boat?

-In short: absolutely, you are responsible for the wake created by your boat. According to the PA Fish and Boat Commission website, it is illegal to operate at faster than a “no-wake” speed within 100 feet of the shoreline, docks, launch ramps, swimmers, and anchored boats. It is also illegal to operate at faster than a “no-wake” speed within 50 feet of another moving vessel. More information on safe boating responsibilities can be found at:

<http://www.fishandboat.com/Boat/BoatingRegulations/Documents/boatrecap.pdf>