

### Must a boat be registered?

Any boat that is powered by a motor (even if the motor is not the main means of propulsion) and operated on public waterways in our state must be registered with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). When you register your boat, you will receive a registration certificate that must be kept on the boat at all times. The Coast Guard also issues marine documents for boat owners that are recognized internationally as proof of ownership. To register your boat, you'll need a previous registration certificate or manufacturer's statement of origin containing a Hull Identification Number (HIN). If you do not have a HIN, contact your local DMV office or visit them on-line at [www.nydmv.state.ny.us](http://www.nydmv.state.ny.us) to obtain form OPS 420. All boats 1973 and newer should already have a HIN.

### Does state law cover "jet skis" and other personal watercraft?

Yes. State law covers "Jet Skis," "Wave Runners," "Sea-Doos" and other personal watercraft. State law requires operators to wear life jackets when on the water, prohibits riding these vessels within 500 feet of a swimming area and forbids operating the vessel recklessly. All personal watercraft operators are required to obtain a boating safety certificate by successfully completing an approved course. Coast Guard Auxiliary and U.S. Power Squadron certificates meet this requirement in addition to courses approved or given by New York State. A list of current courses can be found on the Internet at [www.nysparks.com](http://www.nysparks.com).

The law further seeks to improve safety and training by:

- requiring persons renting personal watercraft to receive basic safe operation instruction from the rental establishment;
- retaining the existing prohibition against the rental or operation of personal watercraft by persons under age 16, and requiring rental

agents to see proof of age and proof of boating safety education for any operators under age 18;

- adding such safety requirements as a horn or whistle capable of a 2-second blast heard for at least 1/2 mile and a one sq. foot fluorescent orange flag or other appropriate U.S. Coast Guard Visual Distress Signal; and
- requiring that the New York Safe Boating course cover the safe operation of all vessels, including personal watercraft.

### Do boats always need a title?

DMV will issue certificates of title for boats that are at least 14 feet long and have a model year of 1987 or later. These titles take the place of a registration certificate as proof of ownership and are the transfer document upon resale. Boats that have been documented by the Coast Guard are not issued a title.

### What if I sell my boat?

When you sell a boat, you must notify DMV of the change of ownership, and the new owner must register the boat in his or her own name. You should remove the registration (validation) sticker when the boat changes hands.

### What if a boat is lost or stolen?

If your boat is lost or stolen, you must notify the DMV in writing within 15 days at the following address:

Registration Records Bureau  
N.Y.S. Department of Motor Vehicles  
Empire State Plaza  
Albany, New York 12228

In addition, if it is stolen, you should notify your local marine law enforcement agency.

### Are sound signals required and what do they mean?

Yes. The exchange of sound signals is required when boats are going to pass at close quarters. The signals mean:

- One Short Blast: Changing course to starboard (right)
- Two Short Blasts: Changing course to port (left).
- Three Short Blasts: Reversing engine.
- Five Short Blasts: Danger, stay away.

### Are mufflers needed?

Yes. The law requires boats built in 1965 or after and operated on New York State waters to have mufflers that limit noise levels to 90 decibels or less when subjected to a sound level test at dock, or 75 decibels or less when measured while operating at any distance from shore. It is illegal to install muffler cutouts or bypasses on any boat.

### What should be done in case of a boating accident?

If an accident results in injury, disappearance or death, notify the authorities immediately. Follow with a written report to OPRHP within 48 hours. For accidents involving only property damage, a written report must be submitted to OPRHP within 5 days. An accident report can be downloaded at [www.nysparks.com](http://www.nysparks.com).

### What is the speed limit for boats?

New York law limits boats to a 5 mph speed when within 100 feet of shore, dock, pier, raft, float or anchored boat. Some lakes have speed limits on the entire lake (45 MPH day, 25 MPH night is common) and may have the 5 mph zone out to 200 feet. Additionally, localities in the state are allowed to enact different speed limits, so you should check with local officials for any local regulations. Speeding is considered reckless operation of a vessel and is prohibited by law. You could be held liable for any damage caused by your wake, so maintain proper speed when passing a marina, fishing area, work boat, or similar area.

### Are operating certificates required?

It is beneficial for anyone who wishes to operate a boat to take the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Power Squadron, or

other authorized organization's boating safety course. However, it is only mandatory in New York State for young people between 10 and 18 years of age, or anyone who wishes to operate a personal water craft such as a Jet Ski, Wave Runner, or Sea-Doo. Insurance carriers can offer reduced rates to owners who have completed an approved boating safety course or who hold a valid U.S. Coast Guard license.

### How does state law handle boating while intoxicated?

Alcohol or drugs can slow a person's reaction at any time, but on the water any use of these substances by the operator can cause severe problems. Recognizing these factors, state law provides tough penalties for boating while impaired or intoxicated (BWI) that generally parallel those for driving while intoxicated (DWI). Under the law, boat operators suspected of being impaired or intoxicated may be asked to take a breathalyzer test or face a \$200 fine and suspension of boating privileges for 6 months. The penalties for conviction vary according to the circumstances but can include one or more of the following:

- fines;
- imprisonment;
- suspension of boating privileges;
- revocation of boat registration;
- required completion of boating safety course; and/or
- additional sanctions ("zero tolerance") for operators under age 21 who drink.

The law also includes penalties for those who operate a boat while the privilege has been suspended.

