



California Boating Laws

California State Parks Division of Boating and Waterways

www.BoatCalifornia.com

There are over four million recreational boaters in California who visit marinas, lakes, rivers and the ocean seeking an enjoyable outdoor recreational experience. In order to ensure that this experience is a safe and enjoyable one, it is important for boaters to know and follow boating "rules of the road".

The *ABCs of California Boating* is an easy to read booklet that explains boating law, regulations and guidelines. Below are some excerpts from this booklet. Free copies are available [online](#).

Life Jackets

- **All passengers:** One Coast Guard-approved wearable life jacket must be carried for each person aboard. Life jackets must be readily accessible and properly fit the intended wearer. Note: *An inflatable life jacket may need to be worn to be considered readily accessible (check the manufacturer's label).*
- **Children:** Every child under 13 years of age on board a recreational vessel of any length must wear a properly fitted Coast Guard-approved life jacket. The law does not apply to: (1) a child who is restrained by a harness tethered to the sailboat; or (2) children in an enclosed cabin.
- **Personal Watercraft/Towing Sports:** Every person on board a personal watercraft (PWC) and anyone being towed behind a vessel must wear a Coast Guard-approved life jacket.

Operation

- **Age Restrictions:** No person under 16 years of age may operate a boat with a motor of more than 15 horsepower, except for a sailboat that does not exceed 30 feet in length or a dinghy used directly between a moored boat and the shore (or between two boats). The law also allows children 12-15 years of age to operate boats with a motor of more than 15 horsepower or sailboats over 30 feet if supervised on board by an adult at least 18 years of age.
- **Alcohol:** No person shall operate any vessel, water skis or similar device that has 0.08 percent or more, by weight, of alcohol in his or her blood. A level of at least 0.05 percent, but less than 0.08 percent, may be used with other evidence in determining whether the person was under the influence of alcohol. A person convicted of operating a vessel while intoxicated could receive up to a \$1,000 fine and six months in jail.
- **Carbon Monoxide:** It is a violation to operate a vessel's motor or generator while someone is: (1) teak surfing, platform dragging or bodysurfing behind the vessel; or (2) while someone is occupying or holding onto a swim platform, swim deck, swim step, or swim ladder, except for a very brief period of time when a person is assisting with the docking or departure of the vessel or exiting or entering the vessel, or while the vessel is engaged in law enforcement or emergency rescue activity.
- **Head-On Situation:** When meeting head-on, or nearly so, either vessel shall signal its intention with one short blast which the other vessel shall answer promptly. Both vessels should alter their course to starboard (right) so that each will pass to the port (left) side of each other.
- **PWC Operation:** PWC's cannot be operated between sunset to sunrise, even if they are equipped with navigational lights.
- **Towing Sports:** When towing anyone or anything behind the boat, there must be an operator and an observer (at least 12 years old) in the boat. No towing of skiers, boarders or floaters between sunset to sunrise

