BOATALABAMA

CERTIFICATION MANUAL

Alabama
Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Marine Police Division

SPONSORED BY

EDITION 2006

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 attaining 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.

Alabama Marine Police officers 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,

M. N. Pugh, Director
Marine Police Division
Alabama Department of
Conservation and Natural Resources

BOAT ALABAMA
CERTIFICATION MANUAL

Sponsored by
Alabama Department of Conservation
and Natural Resources

Marine Police Division
P.O. Box 301451
Montgomery, AL 36130-1451
334-242-3673

M. N. Pugh, Director

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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/al

After passing the online exam, you will be mailed a course certificate from the Alabama Marine Police. 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 Alabama Marine Police Division at **334-242-3673**. For federal boating laws, call the U.S. Coast Guard's Boating Safety Infoline at **1-800-368-5647**.

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

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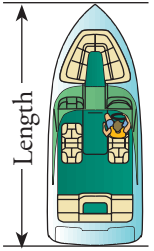
BASICS Before Going Out on Your Vessel

Before going out on the water, take steps to make the outing safe and enjoyable.

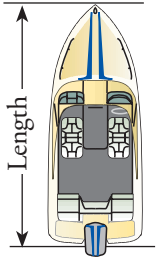
Vessel Length Classes

- 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.

Inboards



Outboards



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.
- Personal watercraft (PWCs) 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

Here are some safe fueling procedures to follow.

- Check the entire fuel system for leaks. Tighten connections frequently—engine vibration can loosen them.
- Turn off all engines and electrical equipment; shut off all fuel valves; and close all windows, doors, and openings.
- Try to fuel in daylight. If light is required, use a flashlight or a light that is spark-proof.
- Never smoke or strike a match while fueling.

> **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.

- When filling a tank or gas can, follow these guidelines.
  - Always remove portable tanks from the vessel.
  - Touch the fuel pipe or tank with the spout to prevent buildup of static electricity.
  - Never fill a tank to the brim—leave room for gas to expand. After fueling, put the fill cap on tightly to prevent vapors from escaping.

- Immediately wipe up any spilled gas. Air out the rag after using it; never throw it in the vessel or the water.
- Store gas on board in a safety-approved storage tank, away from the engine and in an area of good ventilation.

◆ Some additional safety procedures for PWCs are:
- Avoid spills when fueling in or near 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, find the source and make repairs immediately.
- Do not tip the PWC to "fill all the way up." The tank provides for fuel expansion; if tank is over-filled, gasoline may expand and spill into the water.

Filing a Float Plan

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

◆ Describe the vessel, including its number, size, make, capacity, horsepower, and type of engine.

◆ List where you are going, the route, and your expected return time.

◆ Give the number of passengers, their names and addresses, and a contact in case of an emergency.

Pre-Departure Checklist

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

✓ Leave your float plan with a responsible person.

✓ 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 the fire extinguisher is fully charged.

✓ Make sure that the stop button works on a PWC.

✓ Make sure the ignition safety switch and wrist lanyard are in working order.

✓ Make sure you have the required number of personal flotation devices (life jackets) and that they are in good condition.

BASICS On the Water with Your Vessel

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

Encountering Other Vessels

Even though no vessel will always have 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 action to avoid a collision. The following shows what to do when you encounter 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

- If 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
- If 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.

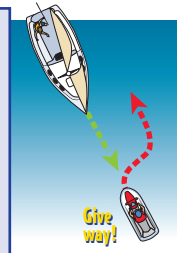
- **Stand-on vessel:** The vessel which should maintain its course and speed
- **Give-way vessel:** The vessel which must take early and substantial action to avoid collision by stopping, slowing down, or changing course

Power vs. Power

Meeting Head-On

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

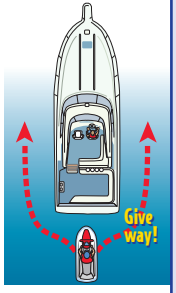
Power vs. Sail: The power-driven vessel is the give-way vessel. The sailboat is the stand-on vessel.



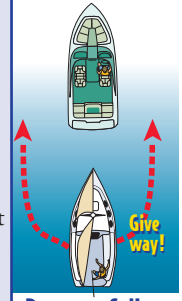
Power vs. Sail

Power vs. Power

Power vs. Sail



Power vs. Power



Power vs. Sail

Crossing Situations

Power vs. Power: The vessel on the port (left) is the give-way vessel. The vessel on the starboard (right) is the stand-on vessel.

Power vs. Sail: The power-driven vessel is the give-way vessel. The sailboat is the stand-on vessel.

Overtaking

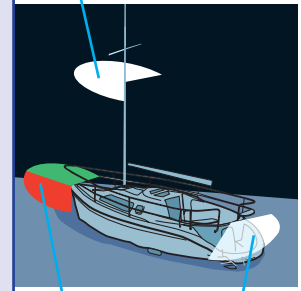
Power vs. Power: The vessel that is overtaking another vessel is the give-way vessel. The vessel being overtaken is the stand-on vessel.

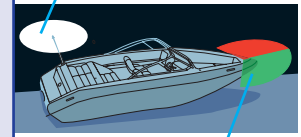
Power vs. Sail: The vessel that is overtaking another vessel is the give-way vessel. The vessel being overtaken is the stand-on vessel.

Nighttime Navigation

You should always be on the lookout for the lights of other vessels when boating at night. Several types of lights serve as navigational aids at night. They are:

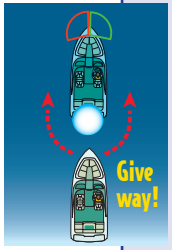
- **Sidelights:** These red and green lights are called sidelights (or combination lights) because they are visible to another vessel approaching from the side or head-on. The red light indicates a vessel's port (left) side; the green indicates a vessel's starboard (right) side.
- **Sternlight:** This white light is seen from behind the vessel.
- **Masthead Light:** This white light, which shines forward, is located on the mast of a sailboat and is required on all power-driven vessels. A masthead light must be used by all vessels at night when under engine power. The absence of this light identifies 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 able to be seen by other vessels from any direction. When sidelights are extinguished, this light serves as an anchor light.





Encountering Vessels at Night

When you see a white and a green 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 navigational rules.



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

Encountering a Sailboat at Night

When you see **only a green light or only a red 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 vessel operator, you will need to know the lateral navigation markers and non-lateral markers of the U.S. Aids to Navigation System.

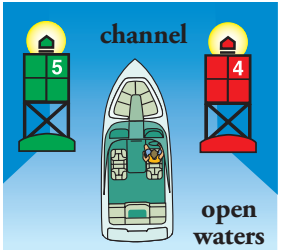
Lateral Markers

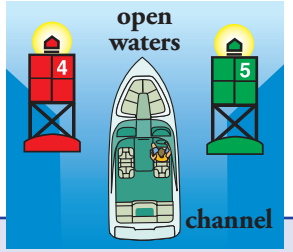
These navigation aids are used to mark the edges of safe water areas; for example, to direct travel within a channel. They use a combination of colors and numbers, which may be applied to buoys or permanently placed markers.

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; if red is on top, the preferred channel is to the left.





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

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

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

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

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) and also may be lighted.

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."

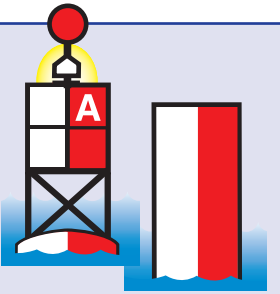
Exclusion

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

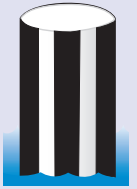
Danger

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

Other Non-Lateral Markers

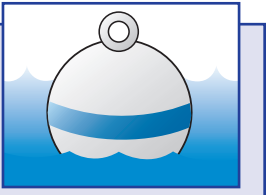


Safe Water Marks are white with red vertical stripes and mark mid-channels or fairways. They may be passed on either side.



Inland Waters Obstruction Marks are white with black vertical stripes and indicate an obstruction to navigation. You should not pass between these buoys and the 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 into the frequencies listed below.

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 anchor from the bow. If you have no anchor, use a "sea anchor," which is anything (a bucket on a line, a tackle box) that will create drag and hold the bow into the wind.

VHF Frequencies Broadcasting NOAA Weather Reports

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

VHF Channels for Recreational Boaters

6 .....Intership safety communications only

9 .....Communications between vessels (commercial and recreational), and ship to coast

13 .....Strictly for navigational purposes by vessels at bridges, locks, and harbors

16 .....Distress and safety calls to Coast Guard and others, and to initiate calls to other vessels

22 .....U.S. Coast Guard broadcasts of severe weather warnings and other safety warnings

24-28 .....Public telephone calls (to marine operator)

68, 69, 71.....Recreational vessel radio channels and ship to coast

Other Boating Emergencies

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

Falling Overboard

- To prevent falling overboard:
  - Don't sit on the gunwale, bow, seat backs, or any other area not designed for seating.
  - Don't sit on pedestal seats when at greater than idle speed.
  - Don't stand up in or lean out from the vessel.
  - Don't move about the vessel when underway.
- If someone on your vessel falls overboard:
  - Reduce speed.
  - Throw the victim a personal flotation device (PFD).
  - Turn the vessel around and carefully pull alongside the victim, approaching the victim from downwind or into the wind, whichever is stronger.
  - Stop the engine. Pull the victim in over the stern.

Capsizing or Swamping

- To reduce the risk of capsizing or swamping:
  - Don't overload your vessel. Balance the load.
  - Turn your vessel at controlled speeds.
  - Anchor to the bow of the vessel, never to the stern.
  - Don't boat in rough water or bad weather.
- If you should capsize or swamp your vessel, or if you have fallen out and can't get back in, stay with the vessel.
  - Try to reboard; or if the vessel is overturned or swamped, hang onto it or climb onto it. Get as much of your body out of cold water as possible.
- If the vessel sinks or floats away, don't panic.
  - If you are wearing a PFD, remain calm and wait for 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

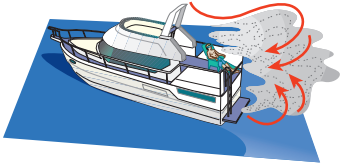
- Dress in several layers of clothing under your PFD, or wear a wet suit or dry suit.
- Learn to recognize the symptoms of hypothermia. Symptoms begin with shivering and bluish lips and nails, and progress to a coma and, ultimately, death.
- To reduce the effects of hypothermia:
  - Get as much of your body out of the water as possible.
  - Don't take your clothes off unless necessary. Remember, clothes trap heat and can help you float.
  - Draw your knees to your chest and your arms to your sides protecting the major areas of heat loss.

- Don't thrash or move about. Excess motion consumes energy and increases loss of body heat.
- Always wear a PFD. It helps you to float without excessive movement and insulates your body.
- If others are in the water with you, huddle together with your arms around their shoulders.

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

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



- Swimmers should never enter the cavity between the swim platform and the stern of the vessel.

Preventing Theft

To defend against theft of your vessel, motor, and equipment:

- Store your vessel so that it is not easily accessed.
  - Store your vessel and trailer in a locked garage/storage.
  - Park another vehicle in front of the trailer, or chain 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 the trailer wheel if parked for an extended time.
  - Purchase a good 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, including state abbreviation.
- Photograph or videotape the interior and exterior of your vessel showing all installed equipment and additional gear and equipment.
- Title and register your vessel. 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.

Boater Safety Certification

Age & 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 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 legally 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 certification, you may operate a vessel *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 legally operate a vessel without supervision.

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 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.
- Persons may operate rented vessels 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.
- Any Alabama resident 16 years of age or older who has not obtained Alabama boater safety certification previously may, for a period of 30 days following the date of sale of a vessel, operate that vessel if these conditions are met.
  - The vessel has been registered in the name of that person.
  - A bill of sale for the vessel, naming that person as purchaser and owner, is in the possession of the person at all times of operation.
- 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 motorized vessel and make it available upon request to any person with law enforcement authority.

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 Alabama Marine Police 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)	$23.00
Duplicate Certification, first and subsequent duplicate (lost or destroyed)	$18.00
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 at the time of renewal your boater certification has been suspended or revoked.
- **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 can be cancelled, suspended, or revoked if you operate a vessel while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or 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 Commissioner of Conservation and Natural Resources 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 Commissioner of Conservation 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

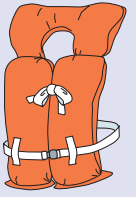
When preparing to go out on a vessel, the operator must check that the legally required equipment is on board.

Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs)

- All vessels must carry one Type I, II, III, or V U.S. Coast Guard–approved 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 Type IV U.S. Coast Guard–approved 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 USCG–approved PFD.
- Each person on board a vessel within 800 feet below a hydroelectric dam and/or navigational lock and dam must *wear* a Type I, II, III, or V U.S. Coast Guard–approved 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 Jacket

These vests are geared for rough or remote waters where rescue may take awhile. They are excellent for flotation and will turn most unconscious persons face up.

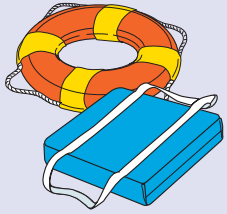


TYPE II: Near-Shore Vest

These vests are good for calm waters and fast rescues. Type II vests may lack the capacity to turn unconscious wearers face up.

TYPE III: Flotation Aid

These vests or full-sleeved jackets are good for calm waters and fast rescues. They are not for rough waters since they will not turn a person face up.



TYPE IV: Throwable Device

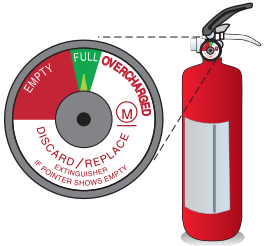
These cushions or ring buoys are designed to be thrown to someone in trouble. They are not for long hours in rough waters, non-swimmers, or the unconscious.

TYPE V: Special-Use Device

These windsurfing vests, deck suits, hybrid PFDs, and others are designed for specific activities, such as 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 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 size and type symbols and the approval number.



- Extinguishers must be mounted in an accessible area. Check extinguishers annually to make sure they are charged, and be sure you know how to operate them.
- Use this chart to determine the type and quantity required.

Fire Extinguisher Requirements

Classification	Foam	Carbon Dioxide	Dry Chemical
type & size	minimum gallons	minimum pounds	minimum pounds
B-I	1 1/4	4	2
B-II	2 1/2	15	10

Length Class	Without Fixed System	With Fixed System*
Less than 26 ft.	one B-I	None
26 ft. to less than 40 ft.	two B-I ***or*** one B-II	one B-I
40 ft. to less than 65 ft.	three B-I ***or*** one B-II and one B-I	two B-I ***or*** 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 in 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 ft. (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 at least two miles away (or if less than 40 ft. long, at least one mile away).
- An all-round white light or both a masthead light and a sternlight visible from 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 ft. (1 meter) higher than the sidelights.

Unpowered Vessels When Underway

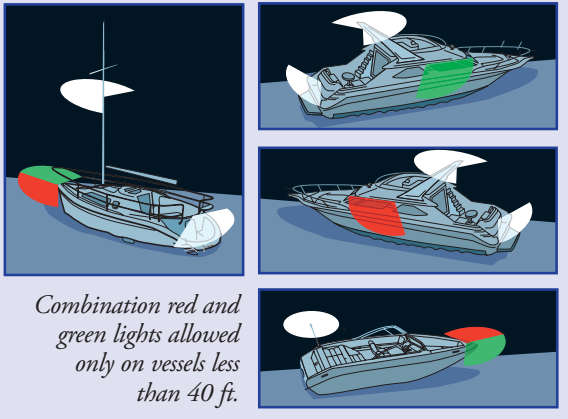
Unpowered vessels are sailboats or vessels that are paddled, poled, or rowed.

- **If less than 65.6 ft.** (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 40 ft. long, at least one mile away).
  - A sternlight visible from at least two miles away.
- **If less than 23.0 ft.** (7 meters) long, these vessels:
  - If practical, must exhibit the same lights as required for unpowered vessels listed above.
  - If not practical, must have on hand at least one lantern or flashlight shining a white light as shown in illustration 3.

All Vessels When Not Underway

- **All vessels** are required to display a white light visible in all directions whenever they are moored or anchored away from dock between sunset and sunrise.

1. Power-Driven Vessels Less Than 65.6 Ft.



Combination red and green lights allowed only on vessels less than 40 ft.

2. Unpowered Vessels Less Than 65.6 Ft.

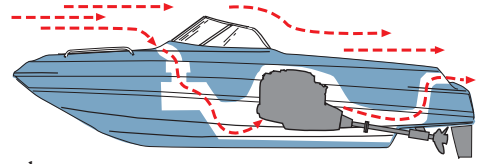
An alternative to the sidelights and sternlight is a combination red, green, and white light, which must be exhibited near the top of the mast.

3. Unpowered Vessels Less Than 23.0 Ft.

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 importance of ventilation is crucial. 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 gas-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 after fueling and before starting your engine.

Backfire Flame Arrestors

- Because vessel engines may backfire all power-driven vessels (except outboards) 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 and check for any damage.

Mufflers and Noise Level Limits

Excessive noise can prevent a vessel operator from hearing signals and voices.

- 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

- On Alabama state waters, the requirements for sound-producing devices are:
  - 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.
- On federally-controlled waters (see page 21), the requirements for sound-producing devices are:
  - Vessels less than 65.6 feet (20 meters) in length, which includes PWCs, are required to carry on board a mouth, hand, or power operated whistle or horn, or some other means to make an efficient sound signal.
  - Vessels 65.6 feet (20 meters) or more in length are required to carry on board a whistle or horn, *and* a bell.

Some sound signals that you should be familiar with are:

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 when under sail alone.

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 are used to signal danger or to signal that you do not understand or disagree with the other boater's intentions.

Federally-Controlled Waters

Vessels must observe federal requirements when operating on:

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

Other Equipment

Ignition Safety Switch

- An emergency ignition safety switch is designed to shut the engine down if the operator is thrown from the proper operating position.
- The ignition safety switch works by attaching a lanyard between the operator and the switch. If the lanyard is removed from the switch, the engine will shut off.
- 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.
- The two types of "diver down" flags are:

Divers 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.

Alfa 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 federal waters whenever these vessels are restricted in their ability to maneuver by the diving operation.

On the Water with Your Vessel

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 4-5
  - 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
  - Failure 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 **"no wake speed"** areas or any other speed zones

"No Wake Speed" means a speed at which your vessel does not produce a wake, or in other words, leaves a flat wave disturbance; not to exceed 5 miles per hour.
"Idle Speed" or **"Slow, No Wake"** means the slowest speed at which it is possible to maintain steering, not to exceed 5 mph.

- **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.

> **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.

Obstructing Navigation

- You must not anchor a vessel in the traveled portion of a river or channel that will prevent or interfere with any other vessel passing through the same area.
- It is illegal to moor or attach a vessel to a buoy (except for a mooring buoy), beacon, light, or any other navigational aid placed on public waters by proper authorities. Also, it is illegal to move, displace, tamper with, damage, or destroy any navigational aid.
- Do not obstruct a pier, boat ramp, or access to any facility.

Homeland Security Restrictions

Recreational boaters have a role in keeping our waterways safe and secure.

- Violators of the restrictions below can expect a quick and severe response.
  - 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. Report all activities that seem suspicious to the local authorities, the U.S. Coast Guard, or the port or marina security.

Vessel Accidents

- The operator of a vessel involved in an accident must submit a written report to the Alabama Marine Police 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 $50.
- Reports of accidents must be made within 10 days of the accident on the forms provided by Marine Police officers, the Marine Police Division, or the county sheriff's office.
- An operator involved in a boating accident should stop his or her vessel immediately at the scene of the accident and:
  - Give assistance to anyone injured in the accident.
  - Give their name, address, and identifying number of their vessel as well as the names and addresses of passengers to the other vessel's operator and/or passengers.
- A uniformed Marine Police officer, 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 slow reaction time. Alcohol contributes to about ⅓ of all boating accidents.

- 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.
    - Any combination of alcohol, controlled substances, or drugs.
    - 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 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 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 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, 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!

Enforcement

- The boating laws of Alabama are enforced by Marine Police officers, county sheriffs, 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.

Marine Sanitation Act

The Marine Sanitation Act 2002-59 (Clean Boating Bill) was signed into law on January 31, 2002, and became effective on October 1, 2003. This law:

- Prohibits the docking, storing, anchoring, or mooring of vessels with a Type III marine sanitation device at marinas without 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 Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
- Charges the officers of the Department of Conservation with enforcing the Marine Sanitation Act as it pertains to the regulation of boat sewage discharges

Specifically for PWCs

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 only during daylight hours. 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

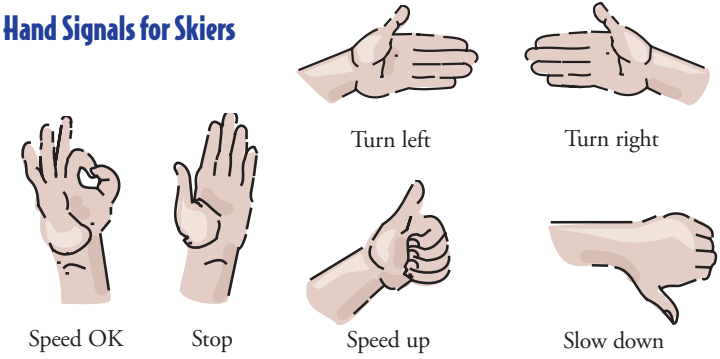
Vessel operators towing a person(s) on water-skis or a similar device have additional laws they must follow.

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 Type I, II, III, or V U.S. Coast Guard–approved 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 sq. 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 2.5 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



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

Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Marine Police Division

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