Watercraft Safety Program
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General

The Watercraft Safety Program establishes the requirements that vessels and users must meet when conducting watercraft operations, motorized or non-motorized, from the University of Southern Maine (USM) or any of its remote sites. It describes general rules of operation, training and qualification requirements, required incident reporting, and personal responsibility requirements.

University of Southern Maine Departments and Remote Sites are encouraged to use this program as a template for the development and maintenance of their own vessel operations and boating safety programs.

Regulatory Guidance

33 CFR – Navigation and Navigable Waters

46 CFR – Coast Guard
Parts 24, 25 & 26 Uninspected Vessels
Part 28 Commercial Fishing Industry Vessel Regulations
Parts 175-187 Small Passenger Vessels
Parts 188-196 Oceanographic Research Vessels

Maine Boating Laws - Title 12, Chapter 715, Watercraft and Air mobiles, Subchapter 1

University-National Oceanographic Laboratory System (UNOLS) Research Vessel Standards and Small Research Vessel Compendium (Section 3 Small Boat Safety).

Requirements

Any employee, faculty, student, or visiting researcher working out of any University facility or conducting any academic, scientific, or research vessel operation, is required to be in compliance with all rules and regulations with regard to vessel operations and boating safety

Non-University vessels used by or carrying USM personnel shall meet safety requirements or other external regulations applicable to the type of operation.

Recreational use of Coast Guard designated motorized research vessels is not permitted.

Departments that conduct boating operations must designate a Boating Safety Coordinator (BSC) for their specific area of operation. The BSC has the authority within their department to mandate department boating safety training and manage the appropriate use of department owned vessels - both motorized and non-motorized.
General Rules of Operation

Normally at least two people must be on board a watercraft, one as a qualified operator. One-person operations must be approved by the BSC.

The operator is responsible for making sure all gear, vessel systems, and equipment are working properly before departure.

The operator is responsible for his/her own safety, the safety of the vessel and its crew, and for adhering to policies and all state and federal regulations (e.g., faculty taking students in non-research vessels must be qualified to take passengers-for-hire).

Operators are required to give the crew a pre-voyage safety briefing. Applicable vessels must carry all of the safety equipment required by state and federal law, and University policies.

Personnel Floatation Devices - All vessels shall carry the required USCG approved PFDs. A Type I, II, III, V or Immersion Suit for each person on boats less than 40 feet. PFDs for coastwise use shall be marked with the name of owner/vessel, have reflective tape, and a Personnel Marker Light. Type I or Immersion suits are required for boats greater than 40 feet. Immersion suits are also required when operating in coastwise areas from 1 October-1 July or greater than 3 nautical miles from shore. PFDs on all vessels designated uninspected research vessel, fishing vessels, and uninspected vessels are required to be approved for commercial use. (Inflatable devices whether Coast Guard approved or not do not count toward required PFDs onboard.)

Every person onboard a vessel when on the open deck, shall wear a USCG Approved type I, II, III, or V life vest (Personal Flotation Device or PFD) or an inflatable device. Most inflatable devices must be worn outside the clothing. The open deck is anywhere on the vessel not enclosed on all four sides. The use of inflatable devices such as air mattresses, inner tubes, or rafts must be approved by the department’s BSC. Approval will require a demonstration of the individual’s swimming ability.

Divers wearing a fully donned buoyant diving suit are waived from this requirement, although divers wearing a buoyant diving suit still must comply with regulations by carrying one of the approved PFDs/Immersion Suits as required by this section and 46CFR28.110. If a diving operation will be conducted from the vessel refer to: Standards for Scientific Diving Certification.

All persons in a boating operation will wear appropriate clothing for the conditions. Extra personal protective equipment (i.e. immersion suits) may be required by the individual department, the University Environmental Health and Safety Office or by state and federal guidelines.
**Float Plans** - Float plans must be filed before departure and the designated contact must be advised of the location of the float plan, return time, and overdue time. See attached document titled *Float Plan*

- Float plans will consist of the following minimum information:
  - Vessel(s) name/designation
  - Date and time of departure
  - Destination/Area of operation
  - Persons on-board
  - Expected time of return
  - Contact person

The float plan should be posted in a location approved by the BSC for each department. The purpose of a float plan is to have a shore side person who knows the identity of those persons on the water, where they are going, and when they are coming back. If the persons on the water do not return, they become overdue and the shore side contact is responsible for notifying proper authorities to organize a rescue party.

Cold water boating operations (less than 60°F) may require special training and equipment. Contact the University Environmental Health and Safety Office or your department BSC for additional requirements.

Vessels will be operated only in areas appropriate to the size and limitations of the vessel. Operators shall adhere to load and passenger limitations established by the manufacturer or other appropriate agencies (i.e., USCG).

Documented periodic inspections are required to ensure that the vessel is in appropriate working condition and contains the required safety equipment. Checklists should be developed or used for each type of vessel. The link below is an excellent pre-trip inspection tool for all water craft. It’s called the *Virtual Vessel Safety Check* provided by the US Coast Guard. It’s interactive, user friendly, and strongly recommended. [http://vdept.cgaux.org/vve/launch.htm](http://vdept.cgaux.org/vve/launch.htm)

**Training Requirements**

All BSC’s are required to complete a boating safety course for the type of vessel they’ll be overseeing. Training and education must be obtained through a qualified boating safety instructor or approved online boat safety course, such as: United States Coast Guard Auxiliary, United States Power Squadrons, American Canoe Association, Maine Bound, etc. The links listed below are excellent training resources.

http://www.boatingbasicsonline.com/content/general/index.php
http://www.cgauxed.org/paddle.htm
http://boatsafe.com/
http://www.boat-ed.com/maine/handbook/

Passengers or crew members on board a vessel with a licensed captain or certified operator are not required to have boating safety training, although it is recommended. Passengers not trained must be briefed by the BSC or vessel captain as to the safety equipment and procedures aboard the vessel.
Boating safety training must also include a hands-on practical boat-handling test to ensure competence with the equipment under the conditions of expected use. Department BSC’s may conduct this evaluation if appropriate testing methods are not available through the training program.

Documentation of training must be obtained for all qualified vessel operators before a project or activity commences. BSC’s must submit documentation to the University Environmental Health and Safety Office showing that the BSC has completed sufficient training for the safe operation of the respective vessels. Such documentation will be maintained as a qualified operators training record along with other appropriate training documentation i.e. General Safety, Fieldwork Safety, Chemical Safety, etc.

**Boat Accident Report**

Boating accidents must be reported within 24 hours. Required report forms must be completed in full and submitted to the University Environmental Health and Safety Office or Risk Manager’s office. See separate Boat Accident Report in **Forms** section of EH&S website.

- Examples of boating accidents include, but are not limited to:
  - Personal Injury
  - Person(s) overboard.
  - Flooding, swamping, capsizing, or loss of any vessel.
  - Collision, grounding, or similar damage to the vessel or boat trailer.

Accident reports may also need to be filed with the Coast Guard, State and local authorities. The Boat Accident Report form can be used for this purpose as well.

**Non-Compliance**

Persons who do not adhere to this policy are subject to suspension or revocation of boating privileges and/or disciplinary action.

Violation of boating safety laws may also lead to investigation, fines, and imprisonment by the USCG, Maine Marine Patrol, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife or other authorities. Any fines levied are the personal responsibility of the vessel operator.

- **Responsibilities**
  - The **vessel operator** is responsible for:
    - Ensuring his/her own safety and the safety of the vessel and its crew.
    - Ensuring all policies and safety procedures are met.
    - Canceling an operation or discontinuing an operation in progress, if an unsafe condition exists.
    - Ensuring that the vessel, vessel systems, and boat equipment are operating properly before departure.
    - Obtaining to the most up-to-date weather forecast via NOAA weather radio or other means and exercising good judgment before departure.
    - Filing a Boating Accident Report whenever any boating accident, or near miss, occurs. This report must be filed within 24 hours or by the end of the next working day.
**Passengers or crew members** are responsible for operating, and conducting all research or other operations on board in a safe and prudent manner and for following the legitimate directives of the vessel operator.

**Department Chairs, Directors, or other supervisors** are responsible for designating a department boat safety coordinator (or carrying out the responsibilities themselves) and for ensuring that the requirements of this policy are implemented within their area of responsibility.

- The **University Environmental Health and Safety Office** is responsible for:
  - Conducting boating safety investigations.
  - Conducting audits of department safety programs.
  - Schedule and conduct periodic safety training in support of safe boating.

For Additional Information

Contact your Department *Boating Safety Coordinator* or University Environmental Health and Safety Office

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Document History, Watercraft Operations Policy

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FLOAT PLAN

1. Name and telephone number of person filing the plan ________________________

2. Description of boat.
   Type __________  Color __________  Trim ______
   Registration No. __________  Length ______
   Name __________  Make ______  Other ______

3. Engine type __________  H. P. ________
   No. of engines ________  Fuel capacity ______

4. Survival equipment
   ☐ PFDs  ☐ Paddles
   ☐ Smoke signals  ☐ Anchor

5. Radio  ☐ Yes  ☐ No
   Type ________  Frequency ________

6. Mobile phone  ☐ Yes  ☐ No
   Tel. # ________________

7. Vehicle license number __________
   Type __________  Trailer license __________
   Color __________  Make of vehicle __________
   Where parked ________________

8. Persons on board ________ # ______
   Name __________  Age ________  Address & Telephone _______________

9. Do any of the persons on board have a medical problem? ☐ Yes  ☐ No
   If yes, what? ________________

10. Trip expectations. Leave at ________________
    From ________________ Going to ________________
    Expect to return by (time) ________
    and not later than ________________

11. Any other pertinent information? ________________

12. If not returned by (time), call the Coast Guard or (local authority) ________________

13. Telephone numbers
    ________________  ________________