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Watercraft Operations Policy

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Watercraft Operations Policy

General

The Watercraft Operations Policy establishes the requirements that vessels and users must meet when conducting watercraft operations, motorized or non-motorized, from The University of Maine 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 Maine Departments and Remote Sites are encouraged to use this policy as a template for the development and maintenance of their own vessel operations and boating safety programs (e.g. Darling Marine Center Marine Operations Manual).

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 staging 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 UM 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 may designate a Boating Safety Coordinator for their specific area of operation. The Boating Safety Coordinator has the authority within their department to mandate department boating safety training and manage the appropriate use of vessels, 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 Boating Safety Coordinator.

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 operation 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 clothing. The use of inflatable devices must be approved by the departments Boat Safety Coordinator. Approval will require a demonstration of their swimming ability.) The open deck is anywhere on the vessel not enclosed on all four sides. 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 Department of Safety & Environmental Management 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. Float plans will consist of the following minimum information:

- Vessel 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 Boating Safety Coordinator for each department. The purpose of a float plan is to have a shoreside 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 shoreside contact is responsible for notifying proper authorities to organize a rescue party.

Cold water boating operations (less than 60 deg F) may require special training and equipment. Contact the Department of Safety & Environmental Management, the DMC Vessel Coordinator, or your department Boating Safety Coordinator 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 for each type of vessel.

Training Requirements

All boat operators are required to complete a boating safety course. Training and education must be obtained through a qualified boating safety instructor or approved on-line boat safety course, such as: United States Coast Guard Auxiliary, United States Power Squadrons, American Canoe Association, *MaineBound*, etc.

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 qualified operator or 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. Departmental Boating Safety Coordinators 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. Such documentation will be maintained in the qualified operators training record along with other appropriate training documentation (i.e. General Safety, Fieldwork Safety, Chemical Safety, etc.).

Boating Incident Reports

Boating incidents must be reported within 24 hours. Required report forms must be completed in full and submitted to the Department of Safety & Environmental Management. Examples of boating incidents 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. (e.g. *State of Maine boating accident report form*).

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 Incident 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 **Department of Safety & Environmental Management** is responsible for:

- Conducting boating safety investigations.
- Conducting audits of department safety programs.
- Schedule periodic vessel safety training.

For Additional Information

- Contact your Department Boating Safety Coordinator or Safety and Environmental Management at 207/581-4055.
- Darling Marine Center Marine Operations Manual

Document History

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