



U. S. COAST GUARD

INFORMATION SHEET



EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS, OPERATOR PROFICIENCY STANDARDS, AND LICENSING REQUIREMENTS FOR OPERATORS OF RECREATIONAL BOATS

ISSUE: Role of the U.S. Coast Guard in education, operator proficiency standards, and licensing for recreational boat operators.

BACKGROUND: Recreational boat operator education and/or licensing requirements are issues being considered by many States throughout the nation. Currently (Jun 06), forty-six States and Territories require some form of mandatory education with licensing requirements in some States such as Alabama and New Jersey. While many of these requirements share similarities, no two are the same. The authority to mandate recreational boat operator education or licensing currently resides with each individual State. However, the Coast Guard is mandated to encourage uniformity of regulations and foster reciprocity between jurisdictions. The Coast Guard's authority to mandate operator licensing and education is currently restricted to commercial vessel operators.

DISCUSSION: In 1998 the National Boating Safety Advisory Council (NBSAC) passed a resolution requesting that the Coast Guard, in cooperation with the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) and other boating organizations, develop a program to encourage and support adoption of mandatory education laws at the State level. In a cooperative effort made possible through the former Aquatic Resources (Wallop/Breaux) Trust Fund, the Coast Guard, NASBLA, Coast Guard Auxiliary, U.S. Power Squadrons, and other stakeholders developed minimum national standards for boating safety education that were published in September 1999, updated January 2005, and are used as the National Boating Safety Education Standards. These types of cooperative partnerships continue to be key principles for guiding the future of recreational boating safety. The Coast Guard continues to provide increased educational awareness through initiatives such as its national multi-year outreach initiative, "You're In Command. Boat Responsibly!" that advocates, along with our key boating safety principles, to take a boating safety course before a boater goes on the water. With boating accidents second only to vehicular accidents in transportation related fatalities, the National Transportation Safety Board has maintained Recreational Boating Safety on its Most Wanted Transportation Safety Improvements List with a recommendation to the States to require mandatory education of boat operators. In 2004, NBSAC passed a resolution advising the Coast Guard to seek statutory authority that would require that a boat operator, on waters subject to the jurisdiction of the United States, possess a certificate showing completion of an instructional course or its equivalent. In addition, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe has forwarded UN Resolution No. 40 "International Certificate for Operators of Pleasure Craft", which is in effect a requirement for credentialing (licensing) of recreational boat operators within the jurisdiction of the signatories. The Coast Guard's Boating Statistics show on average that eighty percent (80%) of all reported fatalities occur on boats where the operator has not received boating safety instruction.

While the Coast Guard does not currently have the statutory authority to set education requirements, proof of proficiency, or licensing requirements for operators of recreational boats, it does strongly advocate that all boat operators be educated in accordance with the established National Boating Education Standards.

Further, Section 46 U.S.C. 13101 encourages uniformity in boating safety efforts, which would foster better cooperation and reciprocity between Federal, State, and local enforcement agencies and help ensure uniform enforcement of laws across all bodies of water, regardless of jurisdiction.

APPROVED: 

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