

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH**

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## **OVERVIEW**

**1.1 What is the purpose of this chapter?** This chapter describes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) policies and procedures for implementing the watercraft safety program.

### **1.2 What is the scope of this chapter?**

A. This chapter applies to:

- (1) Watercraft for which the Service is responsible (e.g., watercraft the Service owns, borrows, rents, or leases),
- (2) Anyone on board watercraft for which the Service is responsible, and
- (3) Service personnel conducting official duties on watercraft, regardless of ownership.

B. Employees performing official duties on commercially licensed watercraft (e.g., ferries, tour boats, commercial vessels, etc.) must abide by established maritime standards for those vessels, any orders the captain of the vessel issues, and all relevant safety standards and authorities in this chapter.

C. This chapter does not apply to:

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(1) Operators of watercraft larger than 65 feet in length. Those operators must have a U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) license and follow USCG operator requirements;

(2) Seaplanes; and

(3) Contractors. Contractors must comply with the safety and health clauses in their contract agreements and with Federal, State, and local watercraft requirements.

**1.3 What are the authorities for the watercraft safety program?**

A. Basic Program Elements for Federal Employee Occupational Safety and Health Programs and Related Matters ([29 CFR 1960](#)).

B. [Executive Order 12196](#), Occupational Safety and Health Programs for Federal Employees.

C. Navigation and Navigable Waters ([33 CFR Parts 1-199](#)).

D. Occupational Safety and Health Act, Federal Agency Safety Programs and Responsibilities ([Public Law 91-596 Sec.19](#)).

E. Shipping, USCG, Department of Homeland Security, Uninspected Vessels ([46 CFR Part 25, Subchapter C](#)), and Lifesaving Equipment ([46 CFR Part 160](#)).

F. [485 Department of the Interior Manual \(DM\) 22](#), Watercraft Safety.

**1.4 What terms do you need to know to understand this chapter?**

A. **Airboat.** A special-use watercraft that requires completing an Airboat Module (i.e., specific training) before operation.

B. **Cold weather Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).** Apparel designed to protect the wearer from exposure to particular elements, which includes the following or their functional equivalent:

(1) *USCG-approved Type V immersion suit:* This suit is stowed on board and put on if there's an emergency. It provides the greatest hypothermia protection.

(2) *USCG-approved Type V worksuit.*

(3) *USCG-approved Type III float coat in combination with flotation bib coveralls or comparable clothing, such as in combination with chest waders.* The chest waders may be made of neoprene or, if you wear adequate thermal protection under the waders, non-insulating material.

(4) *A dry suit and a USCG-approved personal flotation device.* The dry suit must be worn with the proper under gear (i.e., the layer against the skin should be synthetic and the second layer should be fleece thermal).

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C. **Engine cutoff.** A device designed to shut off the engine if the operator is thrown overboard or away from the controls.

D. **Motorboat.** Any motorized watercraft (excluding airboats) 65 feet or less in length that does not require the operator to hold a USCG license or certification.

E. **Motorboat Operator Certification Course (MOCC).** The 24-hour training course that Service-authorized personnel who operate motorboats must successfully complete.

F. **Motorboat Operator Instructor Certification Course (MOICC).** The training course required to teach the MOCC.

G. **Operator.** The person in physical control of the watercraft.

H. **Personal Flotation Device (PFD).** A Department- and USCG-approved device designed to keep the user afloat while in the water.

I. **Watercraft.** Boats and ships collectively that are propelled by hand, wind, or machinery (i.e., motorboats, airboats, sailboats, inflatable rafts, kayaks, and all other vessels).

## RESPONSIBILITIES

1.5 Who is responsible for watercraft safety in the Service? See Table 1-1.

**Table 1-1: Responsibilities for Watercraft Safety**

These employees...	Are responsible for...
<b>A. The Director</b>	Approving a watercraft safety program.
<b>B. The Assistant Director – Management and Administration [serving as our Designated Agency Safety and Health Official]</b>	(1) Overseeing the establishment and management of overall policy and guidance for the proper and safe management of watercraft operations throughout the Service, and  (2) Appointing the Service Watercraft Safety Lead.
<b>C. Regional Directors</b> (1)	Implementing the requirements in this chapter, and  (2) Appointing qualified <a href="#">Regional Watercraft Safety Coordinators</a> .
<b>D. The Chief, Safety Operations, [under the Joint Administrative Operations (JAO) organization]</b>	(1) Interpreting the requirements in this chapter and resolving Servicewide issues and questions about the policy;  (2) Recommending revisions to this policy, as necessary;

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These employees...	Are responsible for...
	<p>(3) Working closely with the Service Watercraft Safety Lead to ensure that the Lead actively participates on the <a href="#">Departmental Watercraft Safety Working Group</a>; and</p> <p>(4) Reviewing and concurring or not concurring with requests to deviate from the high visibility PFD requirement.</p>
<b>E. Service Watercraft Safety Lead</b>	<p>(1) Successfully completing MOCC (or approved reciprocal training) and MOICC training. If the Service Watercraft Safety Lead has not taken these two courses prior to appointment, they must have a minimum of 5 years of boating experience and complete the two courses within 1 year of appointment;</p> <p>(2) Serving as the watercraft safety program point of contact with other bureaus and the Department;</p> <p>(3) Serving as the chairperson of the Service Watercraft Safety Working Group;</p> <p>(4) Serving as our representative on the Departmental Watercraft Safety Working Group; and</p> <p>(5) After concurrence from the Chief, JAO Safety Operations, reviewing and approving or declining to approve requests to deviate from the high visibility color requirement for PFDs.</p>
<b>F. Service Watercraft Safety Working Group [comprised of the Service Watercraft Safety Lead and Regional Watercraft Safety Coordinators]</b>	<p>(1) Meeting at least annually for peer group discussions and exchange of best practices;</p> <p>(2) Assessing training needs and discussing standardized approaches and best practices for conducting the MOCC, MOCC refresher training, the MOICC, and any additional specialized watercraft training modules;</p> <p>(3) Ensuring watercraft safety training meets the operational needs of our workforce;</p> <p>(4) Evaluating the adequacy of the requirements in this chapter and proposing policy and procedural additions or changes, as appropriate;</p> <p>(5) Working cooperatively with other agencies and organizations (e.g., USCG, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Scientific Boating Safety Association, National Safe Boating Council) to increase the watercraft training opportunities available to Departmental personnel. The group does this by developing training</p>

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These employees...	Are responsible for...
	<p>modules and reviewing the courses that all agencies/organizations offer to see if they meet the same requirements as the MOCC; and</p> <p><b>(6)</b> Examining watercraft-related accidents, injuries, and near misses annually.</p>
<b>G. Regional Watercraft Safety Coordinators</b>	<p>(1) Successfully completing MOCC (or approved reciprocal training) and MOICC training. If a Regional Watercraft Safety Coordinator has not taken these two courses prior to appointment, they must have a minimum of 5 years of boating experience and complete the two courses within 1 year of appointment;</p> <p>(2) Coordinating and overseeing the Regional MOCC program, which includes approving all Service MOCCs taught in their Regions and their lead instructors;</p> <p>(3) Reviewing requests for MOCC substitutions and approving or denying each request based on the requirements in <a href="#">section 1.6A</a> and in accordance with <a href="#">231 FW 3</a>, Acceptance of Equivalent Training to Meet Mandatory Requirements and Training Reciprocity;</p> <p>(4) Coordinating Regional compliance with policies and procedures governing their watercraft safety program;</p> <p>(5) Actively participating on the Service Watercraft Safety Working Group;</p> <p>(6) Consulting with the responsible JAO Safety Manager/Specialist while reviewing requests for authorizations to use auto-inflating PFDs as described in Exhibit 1, Safety and Survival Equipment Requirements; and</p> <p>(7) Working cooperatively with other agencies and organizations (e.g., USCG, NOAA, Scientific Boating Safety Association, National Safe Boating Council) to increase the watercraft training opportunities available to Departmental personnel.</p>
<b>H. Responsible JAO Safety Managers/ Specialists</b>	<p>(1) Providing technical assistance and guidance for watercraft safety operations to help personnel comply with this chapter,</p> <p>(2) Working with the Regional Watercraft Safety Coordinators to provide technical support, and</p> <p>(3) Consulting on requests for authorizations to use auto-inflating PFDs as described in Exhibit 1.</p>

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These employees...	Are responsible for...
<p><b>I. Project Leaders/ Supervisors</b></p>	<p>(1) Establishing protocols to ensure that all employees, volunteers, and others:</p> <p>(a) Conduct watercraft operations in a safe manner and in compliance with established Departmental and Service policies and procedures, for example, the completion of a Job Hazard Assessment (JHA) in accordance with <a href="#">240 FW 1</a>; and</p> <p>(b) Maintain equipment in compliance with policies and procedures, such as those in Part 310 of the Service Manual, Personal Property Management;</p> <p>(2) Ensuring that employees, volunteers, and others who operate watercraft on official duty are trained and have the skills in watercraft operations appropriate to the:</p> <p>(a) Type and size of watercraft used;</p> <p>(b) Geographic, climatic, and physical nature of the operations; and</p> <p>(c) Operational task(s) being performed;</p> <p>(3) Maintaining and tracking safety and health training for their employees (e.g., course certificates and refresher certificates);</p> <p>(4) Reviewing and sending requests for authorization to use auto-inflating PFDs to the Regional Watercraft Safety Coordinators as described in Exhibit 1, Safety and Survival Equipment Requirements;</p> <p>(5) Providing the safety and survival equipment that watercraft operators identify as necessary and as described in Exhibit 1; and</p> <p>(6) Completing an accident report within 6 days of being notified about an accident using the Department's Safety Management Information System (SMIS), regardless of whether or not injuries have occurred and regardless of the cost of the associated property damage.</p>
<p><b>J. Watercraft Operators</b></p>	<p>(1) Successfully completing the MOCC (or approved reciprocal training) and maintaining certification;</p> <p>(2) Successfully completing training courses and requirements in specialized subjects as necessary to meet mission and environmental operating conditions (e.g., operations in airboats, shallow-drive watercraft, jet boats, and in rivers and open water);</p> <p>(3) Ensuring the safety of all personnel on board;</p>

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	<p>(4) Operating the watercraft in compliance with existing policies, guidelines, and training;</p> <p>(5) Before beginning any boat trip:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(a) Determining what safety and survival equipment is needed and ensuring that the required equipment is on board and maintained in good, serviceable condition;</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(b) Showing others on board where emergency equipment is located and providing any other information that is essential for an emergency;</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(c) Completing an operational risk assessment evaluation, including the use of the General Assessment of Risk (GAR) model before starting operations and as conditions change throughout the day (the protocol is in the MOCC Student Manual);</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(d) Providing a written or verbal float plan to a responsible individual outlining pertinent details of the trip (see <a href="#">section 1.10</a>);</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(e) Inspecting the watercraft for seaworthiness and proper equipment before taking it out; and</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(f) Keeping a maintenance log for each watercraft, motor, and trailer. The logs must contain the results of inspections, maintenance performed, fueling operations, trip information, total hours, and trailer maintenance information. Operators should keep maintenance logs on board when space allows.</p> <p>(6) Using an engine cutoff switch when required (see <a href="#">section 1.8</a>);</p> <p>(7) Immediately reporting to their Project Leader or supervisor any accident(s), regardless of whether injuries occurred or the cost of any associated property damage; and</p> <p>(8) Completing a Boating Accident Report (USCG 3865), as necessary and as described in <a href="#">section 1.12B and C</a>.</p>
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<b>These employees...</b>	<b>Are responsible for...</b>
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<b>K. Other personnel on board any watercraft</b>	(1) Obeying the watercraft operator's orders,  (2) Adhering to all safety regulations and this policy, and  (3) At all times conducting themselves in a reasonable and prudent manner.
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## **TRAINING, OPERATING, AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

### **1.6 What are the training requirements for watercraft operators?**

#### **A. Motorboat Operator Certification Course (MOCC) and refresher training.**

(1) Service-authorized operators of motorboats must, at a minimum, successfully complete the Department's MOCC or approved reciprocal training.

(a) Contact the Regional Watercraft Safety Coordinator to request approval of a substitute course using [FWS Form 3-2540](#), Training Reciprocity Application.

(b) Substitute training must meet the MOCC minimum standards, including on-water proficiency components. Approval is at the Coordinator's discretion.

(2) Before taking the MOCC, personnel may practice motorboat operation under the supervision of a MOCC-trained operator on board the watercraft. Personnel who have not taken the MOCC may only operate motorboats to gain experience.

(3) Contact the Regional Watercraft Safety Coordinator or lead instructor to enroll in the MOCC. The appropriate contact is listed in the MOCC course schedule on the [National Conservation Training Center \(NCTC\) Watercraft Safety website](#).

(4) Operators must complete MOCC refresher training every 5 years to maintain certification. Details about the MOCC and MOCC refresher are in the "[DOI Watercraft-Safety Course Minimum Standards and Instructor Levels](#)," which is on the NCTC Watercraft Safety website.

**B. Motorboat Operator Instructor Certification Course (MOICC).** The MOCC is instructed by individuals who have successfully completed the MOICC. Details regarding the MOICC are found in the "DOI Watercraft-Safety Course Minimum Standards and Instructor Levels," which is on the NCTC Watercraft Safety website.

#### **C. Airboat Module and airboat refresher training.**

(1) After completing the MOCC, personnel may operate an airboat when accompanied by a certified airboat operator.



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(2) To operate an airboat independently (i.e., to become certified), personnel must complete the "Airboat Module." Details about the Airboat Module can be found in the "DOI Watercraft-Safety Course Minimum Standards and Instructor Levels," which is on NCTC's Watercraft Safety website.

(3) Airboat operators must complete airboat refresher training every 5 years to maintain certification. Details about refresher training can be found in the "DOI Watercraft-Safety Course Minimum Standards and Instructor Levels," which is on NCTC's Watercraft Safety website.

(4) If an operator does not operate an airboat frequently enough to maintain proficiency, the operator must retake the original Airboat Module (not the refresher training) at least every 5 years.

**D. Non-motorized watercraft (e.g., kayak, canoe, pirogue) training.** Operators of non-motorized watercraft must take a non-motorized watercraft operator course, demonstrate their competence, or receive on-the-job training to become competent before they may operate the watercraft.

(1) Operators of non-motorized watercraft are exempt from the requirement to complete the MOCC, but must have documented practical operator safety training pertinent to the watercraft and environmental conditions in which the watercraft is operated.

(2) Examples of how this need might be met include on-the-job training, the MOCC non-motorized module, or one of the courses offered by the [American Canoe Association](#), [Paddlesports North America](#), or the [USCG Auxiliary](#). Details about the MOCC non-motorized module are in the "DOI Watercraft-Safety Course Minimum Standards and Instructor Levels," which is on the NCTC Watercraft Safety website.

**E. Additional training.** Project Leaders and supervisors must ensure that watercraft operators have received adequate training (personal qualifications) to safely operate their motorized or non-motorized watercraft within the type of water and environmental conditions they encounter. Successful completion of the MOCC does not mean that someone is competent enough to operate a watercraft in all conditions that they may encounter.

(1) Training courses in special subjects, such as river operations and open water operations, are also available.

(2) Lack of course availability for training operators does not alleviate the Project Leader or supervisor of the responsibility for ensuring that the operator is properly trained. Contact the Regional Watercraft Safety Coordinator for information.

**1.7 What safety and survival equipment are required for watercraft?**

A. Each watercraft must meet or exceed applicable USCG, Departmental, and Service design and equipment requirements and be outfitted based on expected conditions with equipment necessary for safe operation. Personnel must maintain all USCG-required personal safety equipment as mandated by USCG regulations and State and local laws.

B. For detailed information on the requirements for PFDs, fire protection equipment, anti-exposure

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clothing, immersion suits, communications equipment, navigation aids, and auxiliary power, see Exhibit 1, Safety and Survival Equipment Requirements.

(1) The Service Watercraft Safety Lead may authorize, on a case-by-case basis and with concurrence from the Chief, JAO Safety Operations, deviation from the high-visibility color requirements if special mission requirements, such as those involved in law enforcement, cannot be otherwise satisfied.

(2) The supervisor of the organizational unit conducting the operation must request deviations in writing prior to beginning the activity. The written request must identify alternate safety measures that operators will take.

**1.8 When must operators use an engine cutoff switch?**

**A. Use requirement.** Operators must use an engine cutoff switch when there is a risk that they could be thrown overboard or away from the controls, except in rare instances when doing so increases the risk to personnel. For example, it might be riskier to use an engine cutoff switch when operating upstream from a significant hazard, operating in extremely rough water, performing a rescue, or performing nonhazardous work tasks in the boat. When it is determined prior to an operation that using an engine cutoff switch during a specific mission will pose a greater hazard than not using a cutoff switch, the Project Leader or supervisor or their designee must write a Job Hazard Assessment (JHA) (see [240 FW 1](#)) to identify measures to prevent injuries associated with the operation. If it is determined during an operation that using a cutoff switch will pose a greater hazard than not using a cutoff switch, the watercraft operator must review the General Assessment of Risk (GAR) model to identify measures to prevent injuries associated with the operation.

**B. Motorboats without engine cutoff switches.** We must install engine cutoff switches on all watercraft unless the primary helm is inside an enclosed cabin.

**C. Outboard with tiller.** When operating an outboard with a tiller, the operator must attach the engine cutoff switch before shifting out of neutral.

**D. Airboats.** Airboat operators must use engine cutoff switches at all times except in those rare instances when doing so increases the risk to personnel. For example, it might be riskier to use an engine cutoff switch when operating in deep water in narrow channels where suddenly stopping the engine could swamp the airboat.

**1.9 What are the minimum maintenance documentation requirements?**

A. Project Leaders/supervisors must ensure that all watercraft are maintained in good, serviceable condition as required by the manufacturer and this chapter. Preventive maintenance checklists can be found on the [NCTC Watercraft Safety website](#).

B. The watercraft operator must:

- (1) Inspect the watercraft for seaworthiness and proper equipment before taking it out; and

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(2) Keep a maintenance log for each watercraft, motor, and trailer. Logs for each item can be maintained in separate notebooks or all in one notebook. The logs must contain the results of inspections, maintenance performed, fueling operations, trip information, total hours, and trailer maintenance information. Operators should keep maintenance logs on board when space allows.

**1.10 What are the requirements for a float plan?** Before using a watercraft, the operator must notify a reliable contact either verbally or in writing. Float plan examples can be found on the [NCTC Watercraft Safety website](#).

**1.11 What are the requirements for surf landings?** Landing a watercraft under high surf conditions is dangerous and requires special skills. Only trained personnel with supervisor approval may attempt these landings. A second vessel should be standing by to render assistance.

**1.12 What are the requirements for accident reporting and investigations?** Operators must report all accidents and near accidents to their Project Leader or supervisor. The Project Leader or supervisor is responsible for completing an accident report using the Department's [Safety Management Information System \(SMIS\)](#), regardless of whether or not injuries occurred or the cost of any associated property damage.

A. We must investigate and report serious accidents (i.e., loss of life, in-patient hospitalization of three or more employees or volunteers, amputation or loss of an eye, or Service property loss of \$500,000 or more) in accordance with Service policy in [240 FW 7](#), Accident Investigation and Reporting. The investigation team, appointed by the Assistant Director - Management and Administration, must include at least one member of the Service Watercraft Safety Working Group as a technical expert. Investigators cannot be from the Region where the accident occurred.

B. The operator must also complete a Boating Accident Report ([USCG Form 3865](#)) whenever an accident involving a Service watercraft (including watercraft under contract) occurs in U.S. waters or in U.S. territory waters, and:

- (1) It results in more than \$2,000 in property damage,
- (2) The boat is destroyed,
- (3) A person is injured and requires medical treatment beyond first aid,
- (4) A person disappears from the vessel under circumstances that indicate death or injury, or
- (5) A person dies.

*You can find more information about boating casualty investigations on the [USCG website](#).*

C. If required by State law, the operator must also report the accident to local authorities. State requirements for reporting boating accidents may be more stringent than Federal (e.g., some States require that all boating accidents be reported immediately). Check with your Regional Watercraft

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Safety Coordinator for reporting procedures.

1.13 **How are explosives transported on a watercraft?** See [244 FW 1](#), Explosives Safety.

1.14 **How long may an operator drive or operate a vehicle or equipment (including watercraft) in 1 day?** When possible, supervisors planning work should not require more than 8 hours of operating vehicles, watercraft, or equipment in one 24-hour period (see [321 FW 1](#)).

STEPHEN  
GUERTIN

Digitally signed by  
STEPHEN GUERTIN  
Date: 2023.04.13

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DEPUTY DIRECTOR