

## Chapter 16 – Watercraft Safety

### A. Introduction.

Used appropriately, watercraft are an important machine for productivity in the BLM. Watercraft are often used in program areas such as law enforcement, research, and recreation management. Risk associated with watercraft operations can be minimized by strict adherence to guidelines set forth in this chapter. These guidelines are closely associated with U.S. Coast Guard training standards and DOI policies to provide applicable training and reduce inherent risk.

### B. Purpose.

This chapter specifies minimum requirements for watercraft operation training, inspection, protective equipment, and equipment use to reduce or eliminate accidents and incidents with potential to cause employee injury or damage to government property.

### C. Program Elements.

1. Duties and Responsibilities.
2. Operators.
3. Training.
4. Watercraft Inspection and Equipment Checklist.
5. Requirements and Operating Procedures.
6. Float Plans.
7. Personal Flotation Devices.
8. Cold Weather Personal Protective Equipment.
9. Towing Nongovernmental Watercraft.

### D. Explanation of Program Elements.

1. Duties and Responsibilities.
  - a. The BLM National Watercraft Safety Lead is responsible for:
    - 1) Ensuring the BLM has an adequate number of watercraft instructors for each state and requesting additional resources as needed,
    - 2) Maintaining a roster of all BLM state watercraft safety leads and all DOI watercraft instructors,
    - 3) Maintaining copies of appointment orders and requesting states to appoint a state lead when the position is vacated,
    - 4) Assisting state leads and instructors in finding other DOI watercraft

- instructors as needed,
- 5) Serving as the liaison for state leads who identify national-level issues,
  - 6) Assisting with policy development for the BLM watercraft safety program, and
  - 7) Representing the BLM on the DOI Watercraft Safety Board.
- b. Each state watercraft safety lead is appointed in writing by their associate state director with the following duties and responsibilities outlined in their appointment orders:
- 1) Coordinating state or regional compliance with policies and procedures governing the operation, maintenance, and safety of watercraft,
  - 2) Maintaining a list of all employees in their state who have received watercraft safety training and due dates for refresher training,
  - 3) Notifying the BLM National Watercraft Safety Lead of any change in their status,
  - 4) Notifying employees in advance when refresher training is needed,
  - 5) Assisting district/field offices with watercraft safety training scheduling for employees required to complete the training prior to operating watercraft,
  - 6) Serving as the central point of contact for other BLM watercraft instructors in their state to disseminate information from the BLM National Watercraft Safety Lead, and
  - 7) Identifying issues to the BLM National Watercraft Safety Lead for transmittal to the DOI Watercraft Safety Board as needed.
- c. State safety managers will serve as the alternate state watercraft safety lead in their state or as the state watercraft safety lead if one has not been appointed.
- d. Managers are responsible for ensuring that employees who use watercraft for their jobs have the appropriate level of watercraft safety training. Managers should contact the state watercraft safety lead to determine which staff members need this training and to coordinate this training.

## 2. Operators.

Watercraft operators are responsible for the safety of the watercraft, passengers, crew, equipment, and cargo. Watercraft operators are responsible for knowing all equipment requirements and safety procedures for the craft being operated, including the recommended carrying capacity for people and loaded equipment (e.g., motor, fuel, gear, etc.), lighting, and personal flotation devices in accordance with DOI Departmental Manual, part 485, Chapter 22. The operator must give a safety briefing to crew and passengers before any trip or mission.

### 3. Training.

Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that every BLM watercraft under their jurisdiction is operated only by personnel who have completed the DOI Motorboat Operator Certification Course or equivalent training. All BLM operators of non-motorized boats (i.e., manually operated watercraft, such as a canoe, raft, rowboat, kayak, etc.) must complete a BLM-approved non-motorized watercraft operator course that relates to the type of craft to be operated and the class of water to be operated on. BLM watercraft instructors have access to these training materials.

- a. Available training courses can be found at the [National Conservation Training Center website](#).
- b. This website is not all-inclusive. Contact a state watercraft safety lead or local safety specialist to determine if other courses are available in your area.
- c. Other watercraft training may be substituted for the DOI Motorboat Operator Certification Course and Motorboat Operator Instructor Certification Course. Requests for substitution must be submitted to the BLM Safety Manager. Substituted training must demonstrate that it will meet the objectives of the Motorboat Operator Certification Course objectives, including on water proficiency. Examples of acceptable training are the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Boat Operators Training Course and the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center Marine Law Enforcement Training Program.
- d. Every watercraft operator must have an Optional Form 346, "U.S. Government Motor Vehicle Operator's Identification Card," properly endorsed by their supervisor or authorized issuing officer to indicate the class(es) of watercraft the operator is qualified to operate.

### 4. Watercraft Inspection and Equipment Checklist.

All vessels owned or operated by the BLM (except Class A) must be inspected annually to ensure they are seaworthy and meet all federal and state requirements. This inspection should be conducted by a trained specialist with the Courtesy Motorboat Examination Program. This program is managed by the United States Power Squadrons and the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. If, for logistical reasons, it is not feasible for one of these authorities to carry out the inspection, vessel inspections may be conducted by a qualified mechanic. It is important to maintain documentation of inspections. Federal requirements and other information can be found at the following websites:

- a. [Boating Responsibly](#).
- b. A standard vessel safety checklist can be found at [United States Coast Guard Auxiliary](#).
- c. Many states have specific boating safety regulations and training requirements, which can be learned by contacting the state boating safety office. The National Association of State Boating Law Administrators can provide specific state requirements and contacts at [NASBLA](#)

## 5. Requirements and Operating Procedures.

BLM employees are not authorized to use any government-owned or -leased watercraft for purposes other than official business or emergencies. All BLM offices that have watercraft must address personal protection measures in all operational procedures of watercraft. In addition, BLM Form 1112-5, "Risk Management Worksheet," must be completed and approved prior to use of watercraft. These protection measures must include, but are not limited to:

- a. Watercraft operator standards,
- b. Passenger standards,
- c. Equipment standards,
- d. Communications standards/radio procedures,
- e. Emergency procedures,
- f. Fire suppression,
- g. Standards for personal flotation devices,
- h. Survival equipment,
- i. Current first aid/cardiopulmonary resuscitation certification,
- j. Navigation and rules of the road,
- k. Watercraft operation procedures (e.g., maneuvering, towing),
- l. Trailering and launching procedures,
- m. Basic seamanship,
- n. Safety briefings, and
- o. Float plan procedures.

## 6. Float Plans.

Detailed float plans are available at [US Coast Guard Auxiliary Float Plan](#).

Operators may deviate from these requirements if special mission situations prevent float plan information from being conveyed. Prior to using a watercraft, the operator must provide verbal or written notification to a reliable contact with, at least, the following information:

- a. Description of watercraft,
- b. List of occupants,
- c. Emergency equipment on board,
- d. Point of departure,
- e. Planned route,
- f. Estimated time of departure,

- g. Estimated time of return,
- h. Means of contact (e.g., very high frequency radio, satellite/mobile phone) and contact schedule,
- i. Purpose of trip,
- j. Description of vehicle(s) left at launch site(s), and
- k. Recommended plan of action if overdue.

#### 7. Personal Flotation Devices.

- a. All personnel are required to wear a personal flotation device in open areas of watercraft less than 65 feet in length. An operator can require occupants to wear a personal flotation device in any area of the watercraft regardless of the length of the watercraft. A manually inflatable personal flotation device is recommended for use in enclosed areas of watercraft to reduce the risk of entrapment in the event of capsizing.
- b. Personal flotation devices must be U.S. Coast Guard-approved and rated for commercial use. The outer shell of personal flotation devices must be international orange unless a different high-visibility color is required for special uses (e.g., fluorescent yellow-green, which is approved in ANSI107-2004). Deviation from high-visibility color requirements may be permitted if special mission requirements, such as undercover law enforcement missions, cannot be otherwise satisfied. Deviations must be requested in writing by the supervisor of the organizational unit conducting the operation prior to the conduct of the activity. The written request must identify alternate safety measures to be taken. The BLM Safety Manager will authorize deviations from high-visibility color requirements on a case- by-case basis for a period not to exceed 1 year.
- c. In accordance with 46 CFR 25.25-15, each personal flotation device is required to have at least 200 square centimeters (31 square inches) of retroreflective material attached to its front side, at least 200 square centimeters of material on its back side, and, if the item is reversible, at least 200 square centimeters of material on each of its reversible sides. The material attached on each side of the item must be divided equally between the upper quadrants of the side, and the material in each quadrant must be attached as closely as possible to the shoulder area of the item. In accordance with 46 CFR 25.25-13, each personal flotation device is to be equipped with a light securely attached to the front shoulder area when on board watercraft being operated in coastal waters, oceans, or large lakes.
- d. All personal flotation devices must be inspected and maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Personal flotation devices should be stored in a cool, dry place out of direct sunlight. A "dry" area is considered any suitable area where water will not condense on a personal flotation device. All personal flotation devices should also be kept away from oil, paint,

and greasy substances.

#### 8. Cold Weather Personal Protective Equipment.

Cold weather personal protective equipment (e.g., U.S. Coast Guard-approved exposure suit) must be worn when the sum of air and water temperatures is less than 100 degrees Fahrenheit. An exception to this requirement may be made if an approved risk assessment indicates that risks associated with donning cold weather personal protective equipment (e.g., crew performance degradation, thermal stress) are offset by the benefits of not donning cold weather personal protective equipment. Prior to use, personnel must be trained in the use of this equipment.

#### 9. Towing Nongovernmental Watercraft.

- a. BLM boat operators may only take a nongovernment vessel under tow:
  - 1) When a definite threat to life or damage to property exists.
  - 2) When a disabled vessel is in a remote location and private/commercial towing/salvage service is not available. The BLM boat operator may tow to the nearest safe moorage, dock, or boat ramp.
  - 3) When such action will not place the BLM vessel or crew at risk. The BLM boat operator may tow to the nearest safe moorage location.
- b. Appropriate towing procedures and safety precautions, as taught in the DOI Motorboat Operator Certification Course, must be followed. See DOI Departmental Manual, part 485, Chapter 22, appendices 1 and 2.

#### E. References.

1. Department of the Interior, Departmental Manual, part 485, Chapter 22, Watercraft Safety.
2. Department of the Interior, Departmental Manual, part 485, Chapter 22, appendix 1, Motorboat Operator Instructor Certification Course.
3. Department of the Interior, Departmental Manual, part 485, Chapter 22, appendix 2, Motorboat Operator Certification Course.
4. American National Standards Institute 107-2004.
5. 46 CFR 25.25-15, Retroreflective material for personal flotation devices.
6. 46 CFR 25.25-13, Personal flotation device lights.