



Do I need a License to Drive a Boat?



By Vincent Pica

*Division Commander, 18-06 (1SR)
United States Coast Guard Auxiliary*

Nothing seems more shocking to landlubbers than the fact that, up until relatively recently, all you needed to drive a boat was the money to buy one and the starter-key. Recognizing that increases in hull- and engine-technology have created faster and faster crafts and the rising population of boat owners has made the waters more crowded, especially with respect to "Personal Water Craft", a.k.a., jet skis (which is legally a boat), a number of states are starting to require boating safety courses – including New York State.

As of now, all operators of PWCs, regardless of age, must take a New York State sanctioned boating safety course. The United States Coast Guard offers a number of such courses. If a Bay Constable, seagoing Town, Village or County Police stops you, and you don't have such a certificate, it will be a very expensive visit. Fines now run as much as \$350 for the very first offense. Additionally, if your 16 year old son or daughter takes the family boat out in the bay to go fishing, just as many of us did in years gone by, and they have not taken and passed one of these boating safety courses, they are in violation of New York State regulations as well. It is like driving a car without a license.

As written, the rules are as follows:

Laws for Youthful Operation

If you wish to operate a motorboat (including personal watercraft) and you are:

- Under 14 Years Old: You Must Have a Person 18 or Older On Board*
- 14 to 18 Years of Age: You Must Have a Person 18 or Older On Board, or Hold a Safety Certificate
- 18 Years or Older: You may operate a motorboat alone (if you are alone, PLEASE wear your life-jacket at all times (author's plea). You cannot operate a personal watercraft unless you hold the above-referenced Safety Certificate.

* until 2009, there is a phase-in period whereby, if you are between 10 and 13, have a safe boating certificate with you - and someone 18 years or older that is responsible for you is on another vessel and remains within 500ft of you at all times, you are OK... Got all that?

What Constitutes a Boating Safety Course?

The course, which must encompass at least 8-hours from stem to stern, covers many boating skills and seamanship topics such as the Rules of the Road, how to read and use buoys, boat handling techniques, fire containment and suppression, and other boating safety related topics. The courses are designed as a comprehensive boating course. There are courses out there that are less than 8 hours and purport to be NYS compliant. They are not, full stop.

What to Do?

All well and good – but what can you do if you either need to take such a course or, as all boaters are urged to do, or want to take such a course?

How do you find out when the classes are? Go to the web site!

<http://nws.cgaux.org>

and click on boating classes – and follow the prompts...!

or you can email me at USCGAUX2006@aol.com . Or you can go direct to the flotilla staff officer, Ed Wanamaker, in charge of boater education at uscgaux1806@yahoo.com.

We'll do it all online.

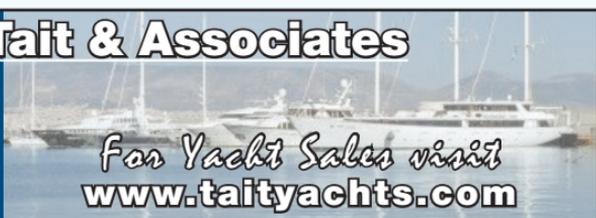
As the laws are now written, this certification is good for life...

So, take a step towards better boating skills and seamanship – even if you don't need a license!

This Week's Column Sponsored By:

Bruce Tait & Associates

(631) 725-4222
1A Bay Street
Sag Harbor, NY



For Yacht Sales visit
www.taityachts.com

For sponsorship of this ad is available. All fees raised will be donated by The Independent to Division 18 of The USCG Auxiliary for use in boating safety.

For information call Jim Mackin @ 631.324-2500