

Watercraft Operations Program

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1. Introduction

The Watercraft Operations Program establishes the requirements that watercraft 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 program as a template for the development and maintenance of their own watercraft operations safety programs.

2. Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this program is to give Responsible Departments the tools to establish and maintain occupational safety for those who operate or utilize watercraft to accomplish their assigned duties/tasks. This program applies to all University employees, and those they supervise, using watercraft for any/all University related tasks and/or at all University facilities.

Departments that conduct watercraft operations are encouraged to designate a Department Watercraft Safety Coordinator for their specific operations. The Department Watercraft Safety Coordinator has the authority within their department to mandate department watercraft safety training and manage the appropriate use of both motorized and non-motorized watercraft. For the purposes of this program the terms 'watercraft' and 'vessel' are used interchangeably.

3. Program Requirements

Laws and regulations pertaining to watercraft operations vary widely based upon the type of watercraft and the intended location of operation. As such it is the responsibility of University departments, Supervisors, and all watercraft operators to follow all applicable laws, policies, and regulations pertaining to their specific operations.

3.1. Guidance for this program is derived from:

- 33 CFR- Navigation and Navigable Waters
- 46 CFR – Shipping
 - Coast Guard, Chapter 1
 - Subchapter C – Uninspected Vessels (Parts 24, 25, 26 and 28)

- Subchapter T – Small Passenger Vessels (Parts 175-185)
 - Subchapter U – Oceanographic Research Vessels (Parts 188-196)
- Maine Boating Laws
 - Department of Inland Fishing and Wildlife; Maine Warden Service
 - Maine Department of Marine Resources; Maine Marine Patrol
 - University-National Oceanographic Laboratory System (UNOLS) Research Vessel Standards and Small Research Vessel Compendium (Section 3 Small Boat Safety).
 - UMS Safety Management Fieldwork Safety Program
 - UMaine Darling Marine Center Marine Operations Manual
- 3.2. University Requirements – The University requires all employees, students, and visitors staging out of any University facility or conducting any academic, scientific, or research operation to follow all applicable rules and regulations pertaining to watercraft operations and boating safety. General rules for University watercraft operations can be found in Section 6 of this document.
- 3.3. Non-compliance – Person who do not adhere to this policy are subject to suspension or revocation of watercraft privileges and/or disciplinary action. Violation of watercraft (boating/vessel) safety laws may also lead to investigation, fines, and imprisonment by the United States Coast Guard (USCG), Maine Marine Patrol, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife or other authorities.

4. Responsibilities

4.1. Responsible Departments

- Ensure that the requirements of this program are implemented within their area of responsibility.
- Designate a Department Watercraft Safety Coordinator.

4.2. Watercraft Safety Coordinators

- Ensure that the requirements of this program are implemented within their area of responsibility.

4.3. Supervisors

- Perform all duties of this program in the absence of a Department Watercraft Safety Coordinator.
- Maintain employee training records per procedures.

4.4. Employees

- Participate in training under the direction of supervisors.
- Follow the guidelines of this program as described.
- Carry out additional responsibilities when functioning in specific capacities described in this section.

4.5. Vessel Operators

- Ensure their own safety and the safety of the vessel and its crew.
- Exercise good judgment and cancel or discontinue operations if unsafe conditions exist.
- Ensure the vessel, vessel systems, and other essential equipment is operating properly before departure.
- Provide a pre-voyage safety briefing to all passengers and crew.
- Ensure all applicable regulations and safety procedures are followed.
- File a Float Plan with a designated contact on shore.
- Obtain an up-to-date weather forecast for the intended area of operation.

4.6. Passengers/Crew

- Conduct all research or other operations on board in a safe and prudent manner.
- Follow the legitimate directives and instructions of the vessel operator.

4.7. Safety Management

- Review applicable regulations.
- Review this program periodically or upon request.

- Provide awareness training opportunities for supervisors and employees.
- Conduct accident investigations and audits of department watercraft safety programs.

5. Training

5.1. Operators

All watercraft operators are required to complete a safety course applicable to their type of watercraft and intended area of operation. Training and education must be obtained in-person from a qualified instructor or through an on-line curriculum pertinent to the type of watercraft and area of operation. Watercraft training resources include:

- American Canoe Association
- Boat US Foundation
- Maine Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
- National Association of State Boating Law Administrators
- US Coast Guard Auxiliary
- US Power Squadrons

Watercraft safety training must also include a hands-on practical training session to ensure competence with the chosen watercraft, associated equipment, and conditions of expected use. Department Watercraft Safety Coordinators may conduct this evaluation if appropriate practical training methods are not available through the chosen training program.

5.2. Crew/Passengers

Passengers or crew members on board a watercraft with a qualified operator or licensed captain are not required to have watercraft safety training, but must be briefed by the qualified operator or captain regarding onboard safety equipment and procedures.

5.3. Documentation

Documentation of training must be obtained for all watercraft operators before operational activities commence. Training records will be maintained per Department procedures.

6. General Rules of Operation

6.1. Watercraft Staffing, Type, and Use

Normally at least two people must be on board a watercraft, one as a qualified Operator. If the chosen watercraft is designed for sole-occupancy, operations should be conducted in tandem (two comparably equipped watercraft with trained operators). Single-person/solo operations must be approved by the Department Watercraft Safety Coordinator. Watercraft 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. United States Coast Guard (SCG)).

6.1.1. University-Owned Watercraft

- Research Vessels – University owned vessels designated as USCG Research Vessels (R/V) may not be used for recreational purposes.
- Undocumented Vessels – Vessels without USCG R/V designation used to transport students or other non-employee passengers, must be piloted by operators authorized to take “passengers for hire” (i.e. USCG License required).

6.1.2. Non-University Watercraft – Vessels not owned by the University but carrying University personnel must meet all rules, regulations, and safety requirements applicable to the type of vessel and operation.

6.2. Safety Equipment – All vessels must carry all safety equipment required by federal, state, and local law.

6.2.1. Personnel Floatation Devices (PFD)

- 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 Immersion suits are required for boats greater than 40 feet.
- Type I Immersion suits are also required when operating in coastwise areas from 1 October – 1 July or greater than three (3) nautical miles from shore.

- PFDs on all vessels designated as uninspected research vessels, fishing vessels, and uninspected vessels are required to be approved for commercial use.
- Inflatable devices do not count toward required PFDs onboard, even if the device is USCG approved.

6.2.2. Personal Floatation Devices (Use)

- Every person onboard a vessel when on the open deck, shall wear a USCG Approved type I, II, III, or V life vest or an inflatable device. The open deck is anywhere on the vessel not enclosed on all four sides.
- The use of inflatable devices must be approved by the Department Watercraft Safety Coordinator. Approval will require a demonstration of their swimming ability. Most inflatable devices must be worn outside clothing.
- 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 46 CFR 28.110.

6.2.3. Clothing – All persons onboard a watercraft will wear clothing appropriate for the conditions and local environment. Extra personal protective equipment (i.e. immersion suits) may be required by the department, or other applicable regulation.

6.3. Float Plan – Float Plan must be filed before departure and the designated contact must be advised of the location of the float plan, return time, and overdue time.

6.3.1. Purpose and Use – The purpose of a float plan is to have a competent and reliable person onshore who knows the watercraft, the identity of those onboard, where they are going, and when they intend to return. If the watercraft does not return at the designated time, it is the responsibility of the shore contact to attempt to contact the vessel for an update. If contact with the vessel cannot be made, it is the responsibility of the shore contact to notify the appropriate authorities.

6.3.2. Content – Float plans must contain the following information:

- Vessel name/designation

- Date and Time of departure
- Destination/Area of operation
- Number of Persons on-board
- Expected Time of Return
- Contact Person Name and Phone Number

6.3.3. Accessibility – The float plan must be posted in a location approved by the Department Watercraft Safety Coordinator.

6.4. Inspections – Documented periodic inspections are required to ensure that vessels are in appropriate working condition and contain the required safety equipment. Checklists should be developed for each type of vessel used in the Department, pertinent to the type of vessel and intended area of operation.

6.5. Special Conditions

6.5.1. Cold Water – Cold water boating operations (less than 60° F) may require special training and equipment. Contact the Department Watercraft Safety Coordinator, UMS Safety Management, or the DMC Vessel Operations Coordinator for additional guidance and requirements.

6.5.2. Diving Operations – If diving will be conducted from the vessel refer to the UMaine Standards for Scientific Diving and contact the UMaine Diving Operations Manager.

7. Incident Reporting

Watercraft incidents must be reported immediately upon return to the Department Watercraft Safety Coordinator and within 24 hours to UMS Risk Management. In conjunction with UMS Risk Management, incident reports may also need to be filed with local, state, or other authorities (i.e. State of Maine boating accident report form).

Examples of watercraft 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

8. Record Retention

All records and documentation must be maintained according to APL-IV-D and APL-II-E.

9. Document History

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