

## Department of the Interior Departmental Manual

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**Effective Date:** 4/9/2024  
**Series:** Safety Management  
**Part 485:** Safety and Occupational Health Program  
**Chapter 22:** Watercraft Safety

**Originating Office:** Office of Occupational Safety and Health

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### 485 DM 22

**22.1 Purpose.** This chapter establishes the minimum requirements for the safe operation of the Department of the Interior (Department) watercraft and for the training of the Departmental watercraft operators.

### 22.2 Scope.

A. The policy in this chapter applies to watercraft for which the Department is responsible (e.g., watercraft the Department owns, borrows, rents, or leases), anyone on board watercraft for which the Department is responsible, and the Department personnel conducting official duties on watercraft regardless of ownership. Employees performing official duties on commercially licensed watercraft (ferries, tour boats, commercial vessels, etc.) will abide by established maritime standards for those vessels, orders issued by the captain of the vessel and in accordance with all relevant safety standards and authorities noted in this chapter.

B. Seaplanes are not within the scope of this chapter.

C. Contractors are not within the scope of this chapter but must comply with the safety and health clauses in their contract agreement and with Federal, State, and local watercraft requirements.

### 22.3 Authorities.

A. Public Law 91-596, Sec. 19, Federal Agency Safety and Health Program Responsibilities

B. Executive Order 12196, Occupational Safety and Health Programs for Federal Employees.

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C. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) General Industry Standards, 29 CFR 1910; Shipyard Standards, 29 CFR 1915; Marine Terminals, 29 CFR 1917; Longshoring Standards, 29 CFR 1918.

D. 46 USC 2109 - Public vessels.

E. 33 CFR, Navigation and Navigable Waters, Subchapter S, Boating Safety.

F. 46 CFR 25, Shipping, U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), Department of Transportation, Requirements, Subpart 25.25.

#### 22.4 References.

A. 412 DM – Motor Vehicle Management.

B. American National Standards Institute (ANSI)/International Safety Equipment Association (ISEA), High Visibility Safety Apparel and Headwear.

C. U.S. Coast Guard, Navigational Rules, International-Inland.

D. U.S. Coast Guard, 46 CFR Part 160, Inflatable Personal Flotation Devices.

E. Departmental Watercraft-Safety Course Minimum Standards and Instructor Levels.

#### 22.5 Definitions.

A. Accident - As defined by 33 CFR 173.55.

B. Motorboat - Any motorized watercraft 65 feet or less in length that does not require a USCG license or certification to operate.

C. Operator - The individual in physical control of the watercraft.

D. Personal Flotation Device (PFD) - Commonly known as a life jacket. Various types of PFDs are available. The type of a PFD selected depends on user activity, weather conditions, and user preference. See section 22.7C of this chapter.

E. Watercraft - Boats, vessels, and ships, collectively, that are propelled manually, by wind, or machinery (e.g., airboats, sailboats, inflatable rafts, kayaks, canoes, personal watercraft, and other vessels), excluding seaplanes.

## 22.6 Responsibilities.

A. Heads of Bureaus and Offices. Implement a watercraft safety program within their Bureau or Office in compliance with this chapter.

B. Department Office of Occupational Health and Safety.

(1) Coordinate with the Department Safety and Health Council, to develop, review and revise standards for watercraft safety training such as the Motorboat Operator Certification Course (MOCC), Motorboat Operator Instructor Certification Course (MOICC), refresher training, and MOCC modules (e.g., Airboat Module, Open-Water Module, and River Module).

(2) Coordinate with the Department Safety and Health Council to develop and provide training materials.

C. Department Safety and Health Council. Sponsor the Department Watercraft Safety Work Group (WSWG) by providing guidance and assistance.

D. Bureau or Office Safety Managers.

(1) Ensure the appointment of a Bureau or Office watercraft safety coordinator.

(2) Review requests for deviations to Personal Floatation Device (PFD) requirements as described in section 22.7C of this chapter. This responsibility may be delegated to a Bureau or Office watercraft safety coordinator or regional safety managers.

E. Department Watercraft Safety Work Group.

(1) Recommend to the Department Safety and Health Council changes to program and policy established in this chapter.

(2) Meet as necessary, but at least annually, for peer group discussions, exchange of accident, incident, and near-miss information, and discussion of best practices.

(3) Work cooperatively with other agencies and organizations (e.g., United States Coast Guard, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Scientific Boating Safety Association, National Safe Boating Council, etc.) to increase the watercraft training opportunities available to Department personnel (e.g., through the development of training modules and expanding the numbers of courses that have reciprocity with the Department-MOCC).

(4) Review and update (as necessary) the MOCC and MOICC curricula on an annual basis.

(5) Establish, review, and update minimum standards for watercraft training.

F. Watercraft Safety Coordinators.

(1) Serve as the watercraft safety program points of contact for their respective Bureau or Office and help coordinate watercraft safety activities and operator training.

(2) Complete MOCC and MOICC training. Must be experienced boat operators with recognized expertise in boating.

(3) Serve as their Bureau or Office representatives on the Department Watercraft Safety Work Group (WSWG).

(4) Review requests for MOCC and MOICC substitutions and approve or deny each request based on the requirements in the Department Watercraft-Safety Course Minimum Standards and Instructor Levels.

(5) Collect annual agency watercraft accident, incident, and near-miss data and report it to the WSWG.

G. Supervisors.

(1) Establish protocols to ensure that all Departmental personnel and volunteers:

(a) Conduct watercraft operations in a safe manner and in compliance with established Bureau or Office policies and procedures;

(b) Maintain equipment in compliance with existing policies and procedures;

(c) Ensure that operators have the skills needed for the conditions in which they are reasonably expected to operate watercraft;

(d) Report all boating accidents, incidents, and near misses to the Bureau or Office safety manager who may delegate responsibility to their watercraft safety coordinator.

(2) Ensure that all Departmental personnel who operate and work in watercraft on official duty have training in watercraft operations appropriate for:

- (a) Type and size of watercraft used;
- (b) Geographic, climatic, and physical nature of the operations; and
- (c) Operational tasks being performed.

(3) Provide safety and survival equipment that the watercraft operator identifies as necessary.

H. Watercraft Operators.

- (1) Successfully complete the training requirements outlined in this chapter.
- (2) Ensure the safety of personnel on board, regardless of position and grade, and operate the watercraft in compliance with existing policies, guidelines, and training.
- (3) Conduct watercraft operations while in control of the vessel.
- (4) Conduct a safety briefing and risk assessment prior to departure.
- (5) Immediately report any watercraft accidents, incidents, and near misses to their supervisor.

I. Watercraft occupants other than the operator.

- (1) Obey the instructions of the watercraft operator or designated operator in charge.
- (2) Adhere to all safety regulations.
- (3) Conduct themselves in a reasonable and prudent manner at all times.

**22.7 Requirements.** Bureaus and Offices engaged in watercraft operations will establish a watercraft safety program that includes the following minimum requirements:

A. Safe Watercraft Operation.

- (1) Departmental watercraft will be operated in a safe and prudent manner and in accordance with Federal standards in addition to the requirements in this chapter.

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(2) Departmental watercraft will meet or exceed applicable USCG design and equipment requirements.

(3) In addition to basic safety devices required by Federal regulations, Departmental watercraft will be outfitted, based on expected conditions, with other equipment necessary for safe operation. This may include communications gear, navigation aids, and satellite navigation. Special consideration should be given for the use of up-to-date commercially available tracking systems.

(4) Departmental personnel will be trained prior to operating watercraft. See sections 22.7E of this chapter.

(5) Departmental personnel operating watercraft normally subject to USCG licensing regulations due to their size or material transported, will be licensed in accordance with the requirements in 46 CFR 25. Departmental watercraft will meet the applicable USCG inspection and certification requirements.

(6) Periodic inspection and maintenance programs will be established for all Departmental watercraft and will adhere to the same requirements for motor vehicles in 412 DM - Department of the Interior Property Management Regulations – Motor Vehicle Management. Records of inspections and maintenance will also follow the same process required for motor vehicles in 412 DM.

B. Float Plans.

(1) 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;

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- schedule;
- (h) Means of contact (e.g., VHF radio, mobile phone) and contact
  - (i) Purpose of the trip;
  - (j) Description (if applicable) of vehicle(s) left at launch site(s);
  - (k) Action to be taken by boat operator if the trip is delayed;
  - (l) Action to be taken by the float plan contact if the boat is overdue.
- (2) Deviation from these requirements is permitted if 24-hour dispatch is being utilized (e.g., law enforcement and search and rescue).

C. Personal Flotation Devices (PFD).

- (1) All personnel are required to wear a PFD in open areas of watercraft less than 65 feet in length unless anchored, made fast to the shore, or aground. An operator can require occupants to wear a PFD in any area of the watercraft under any conditions. (Exception: divers about to enter the water or who have just returned to the boat).
- (2) A manually inflatable PFD is recommended for use in enclosed areas of watercraft to reduce the risk of entrapment in the event of capsizing.
- (3) PFDs must be USCG-approved, appropriately rated for the type of watercraft, and designed for operational applications, and durability and mission requirements. The outer shell of PFDs will be a high-visibility color (which highly contrasts with water). All PFDs will have retroreflective material in accordance with 46 CFR 25.25-15. All PFDs will have lighting when operating at night that meets the standard found in 46 CFR 25.25-13, regardless of the body of water on which the boat is operated.
- (4) PFD requirements for non-motorized watercraft operation will be determined at the discretion of the individual Bureaus and Offices. However, PFD colors and retroreflective material must provide for enhanced visibility for search and rescue purposes.
- (5) Deviation from the high-visibility color requirements in Section 22.7C(3) in this chapter may be permitted if special mission requirements, such as those involved in law enforcement, cannot be otherwise satisfied. Deviations must be requested in writing by the supervisor of the organizational unit conducting the operation prior to beginning the activity. The written request will identify alternate safety measures to be taken. Deviations will be authorized on a case-by-case basis by the individual Bureau or Office safety manager.

(6) All PFDs must be inspected and maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. PFDs must 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 PFD. All PFDs should be kept away from oil, paint, and greasy substances.

D. Operating in cold weather and cold water requires identifying (in a risk assessment) ways to mitigate these risks using operational adjustments and/or appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (e.g., USCG approved exposure suit, dry suit with thermal layering, etc.).

E. Training.

(1) Departmental personnel must complete the MOCC before operating any motorboats while conducting official duties, and the MOCC must be completed by anyone operating motorboats for which the Departmental is responsible (e.g., watercraft the Departmental owns, borrows, rents, or leases).

(2) Motorboat operator certifications will be valid for five years. To recertify, operators must successfully complete the refresher training outlined in the Departmental Watercraft Safety Course Minimum Standards and Instructor Levels within those five years. If an operator has not had a refresher within five years of the completion of their MOCC, or last MOCC refresher, their supervisor will work with the Bureau or Office watercraft safety coordinator (or their designee) to identify the appropriate training to reinstate the operator's qualification.

(3) Successful completion of the MOCC does not imply that personnel are competent to operate any motorboat in all conditions that they may encounter. Supervisors must ensure that watercraft operators receive safety and operations training on the watercraft, in the environmental conditions, and in the areas, they will be operating. MOCC modules, developed by the Department to help meet some specialized training needs, are outlined in the Departmental Watercraft-Safety Course Minimum Standards and Instructor Levels.

(4) 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. 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 (<http://www.americancanoe.org>), , or US Coast Guard Auxiliary (<http://www.cgaux.org/boatinged/classes/2011/psam.php>). Training must meet the criteria of the Departmental Watercraft-Safety Course Minimum Standards and Instructor Levels.



(5) In preparation for taking the MOCC or an MOCC module, Departmental personnel may practice elementary operating skills under the on-board supervision of an experienced operator who has completed the corresponding training.

(6) The MOCC and associated modules will be conducted in accordance with the objectives outlined in the Departmental Watercraft-Safety Course Minimum Standards and Instructor Levels.

(7) Departmental personnel successfully completing the MOICC will be qualified to teach the MOCC as outlined in the Departmental Watercraft-Safety Course Minimum Standards and Instructor Levels.

(8) Other watercraft training may be substituted for the Departmental MOCC and MOICC. Requests for substitutions must be submitted to the Bureau, Office, or regional/state safety manager in consultation with the Bureau or Office watercraft safety coordinator. Any training that is substituted must be comparable to MOCC or MOICC objectives.

(9) Airboat operator certification will be valid for five years. To recertify, operators must successfully complete the refresher training outlined in the Departmental Watercraft-Safety Course Minimum Standards and Instructor Levels within those five years. If an operator has not had a refresher within five years of the completion of their Airboat course or last Airboat refresher, their supervisor will work with the Bureau watercraft safety coordinator (or their designee) to identify the appropriate training to reinstate the operator's qualification.