

MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
MARINE GATHERINGS
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

What is a marine gathering?

A marine gathering is an intentional congregation of more than 100 vessels in a specific area of water that, by the event's nature, circumstances, or location, creates extra or unusual hazards to life or property.

How do you determine whether or not an event creates extra or unusual hazards?

The Department considers the following factors when determining whether a marine event creates extra or unusual hazards:

1. Will the event be held where commercial and pleasure craft are customarily found?
2. Will the event likely accumulate additional participants and or spectators?
3. Will the event congest routine navigation in and around the area?
4. Will the event have inherently hazardous competitions or activities?
5. Will the event likely generate complaints from neighboring communities or other boaters?

What is a marine gathering permit?

In 2012, the General Assembly passed legislation establishing a marine gathering permit to provide the Natural Resources Police, local law enforcement, and first responders adequate notice of large gatherings on State waters. The permit process helps law enforcement units and emergency services prepare appropriate safety and security measures for these large events. It also compels event sponsors and organizers to take a proactive roll in planning and managing for safety and security during their private parties on the water.

The 2012 legislation authorizes the Natural Resources Police to establish and enforce certain terms and conditions in a permit, including a requirement that the marine gathering organizer have a minimum number of security staff at the gathering. The Department may also require the gathering organizer to place buoys to mark the gathering's boundaries or to create navigation pathways or access channels for safety purposes. The application fee for a marine gathering permit will be set out in regulation and will not exceed the costs of processing the permit. If a marine gathering organizer fails to obtain or comply with the permit, the Natural Resources Police may disband the gathering if necessary to protect public safety and maintain safe navigation.

Who needs to apply?

An organizer or planner of an event on State waters must apply for a permit if the event will likely:

- (1) involve or attract 100 vessels or more;
- (2) last three (3) hours or more; and
- (3) create an extra or unusual hazard based upon consideration of the criteria set out in the answers above.

What is the process for obtaining a permit?

At least 45 calendar days prior to a marine gathering, an organizer shall submit a complete **application** along with the payment of \$100, payable to the Department of Natural Resources, to:

Natural Resources Police
ATTN: Marine Gatherings Coordinator
Department of Natural Resources
580 Taylor Avenue, Bldg. E-3
Annapolis, Maryland 21401.

The Department strives to process applications and issue permits within 10 business days. Each permit will be issued on an individual basis, tailored specifically for an event based upon representations made during the application process. Once the permit is issued, the marine gathering organizer is responsible for carrying out and complying with the terms and conditions of the permit.

What terms and conditions may be required in a permit?

Terms and conditions in a marine gatherings permit may include:

1. Limitations on the duration of the event;
2. Presence of security officers;
3. The placement of buoys outlining event boundaries and access channels; and
4. Presence of rescue personnel and/or lifeguards.

Security Officers. If a marine gatherings permit requires the presence of one or more security officers at a marine gathering, the security officer(s) must be readily identifiable and have a primary duty to prevent and deter disorderly conduct and criminal behavior. Security personnel must have a suitable boat for their use and must be able to communicate effectively with other security and rescue personnel, law enforcement personnel and emergency services. A working cell phone is sufficient for communication purposes.

Buoys. A buoy used to mark a boundary or access channel of a marine gathering must be a temporary floating marker that is anchored and easily identifiable. Buoys must be clearly marked with the words: “NO ANCHORING” or EVENT and should be the same size and color of other buoys used at the event.

Rescue personnel and lifeguards. Rescue personnel and lifeguards required at marine gatherings must be readily identifiable, trained in basic first aid, and able to respond to incidents requiring minor first aid. Lifeguards must have a current American Red Cross Lifeguard Training certificate, and possess a current American Red Cross Standard First Aid certificate or equivalent.

What are the laws and regulations associated with marine gathering permits?

The law establishing marine gatherings in Maryland is in Maryland Code Annotated, Natural Resources Article § 8-725.7 (2012). The text of the legislation that became effective June 1, 2012, may be found here: http://mlis.state.md.us/2012rs/chapters_noln/Ch_178_sb0127T.pdf.

The Department intends to propose regulations related to the application for and issuance of marine gathering permits in the summer of 2012. They will be made available here as soon as they are submitted to the Joint Committee on Administrative, Executive and Legislative Review.

Contact Information for Comments and Questions

Public comment can be made during the public comment period at: MarineGatheringsPublicComment@dnr.state.md.us

Permit applications will be available once the regulation takes effect. Completed applications must be submitted a minimum of 45 days prior to the event.