

SAFETY RULES - Recreational Vessels

What is being considered?

The Department would like to clearly state that boaters must follow the safety rules of the United States Coast Guard when operating a recreational vessel on waters of the State. This would apply to all waters in Maryland (nontidal, tidal, and coastal).

Why is this change necessary?

It was recently determined that the safety rules of the United States Coast Guard for recreational vessels only apply in places where the Coast Guard has jurisdiction. While this is a large majority of the waters used for boating in the State, the Department believes it is necessary and appropriate for all boats to follow these rules. Examples include the requirement for all vessels to have a noise-producing device on board or for most motorized vessels to have a fire extinguisher on board.

Who will this affect?

Anyone who boats recreationally in the State of Maryland.

Additional Information

- Maryland State Requirements for Recreational Vessels
<https://dnr.maryland.gov/nrp/Documents/BoatingSafety/recreationvessels.pdf>
- A Boater's Guide to the Federal Requirements for Recreational Boats
<https://www.uscgboating.org/assets/1/AssetManager/Boaters-Guide-to-Federal-Requirements-for-Recreational-Boats-20231108.pdf>

Has this change been discussed with advisory bodies or other interested or impacted individuals?

This idea was scoped with the Boat Act Advisory Committee (BAAC) at their meeting on January 22, 2026.

Regulatory Process

Boating rules in Maryland may be created by either the General Assembly or the Department. When the Department creates a boating rule, it is called a regulation. When the General Assembly creates a rule, it is called a statute. The Department often has to create a regulation to implement a statute. The regulatory process begins with scoping and the Department follows normal procedures as concepts move forward.

During the scoping process, the Department gathers suggestions and ideas from stakeholders and others about how to solve a boating problem or address a need. The goal of scoping is to identify issues, potential impacts, and reasonable alternatives associated with the issues so that management actions can be developed. After the public has had an opportunity to comment on possible management actions during the scoping process, the Department considers these comments and develops an appropriate management strategy.

When would this be effective?

The Department projects that this change could be effective in the summer of 2026. However, the exact date cannot be determined at this time.