



# WHAT FLOATS YOUR BOAT: **STAYING SAFE** ON THE WATER

*Disclaimer: This guide is meant to be used for educational purposes only.  
For additional information, please refer to the United States Coast Guard.*

*Last Updated: April 2022*

Safe boating should be a top priority as you plan to head out for a boat day. To help you get started, we created this safety guide that includes tips for items to bring with you, how to prepare for the weather, and more.

In this guide, we'll cover:

- Top Safety Equipment
- Rules of the Water
- Boating Laws
- Preparing for a Boat Day
- Helpful Phone Numbers

## Top Safety Equipment

A boating emergency can happen at any time and sometimes be out of your control. The unknown makes it important to always be prepared and have the right equipment on board. You can find some of our recommendations below.

- **Lifejackets or personal flotation devices (PFDs)** for everyone on board.
- **VHF marine radios** are continually monitored on channel 16 by the U.S. Coast Guard for distress calls. This channel is for emergency communication only. VHF are an important tool to bring because your cell phone won't always work when you are out on the water. Even when you are in cell service, you won't always know the phone numbers of nearby boaters to call and the U.S. Coast Guard doesn't monitor cell phone calls.
  - You can register your VHF Radio on [boatus.com](http://boatus.com) for DSC (Digital Selective Calling) so you can push a distress button on your radio, and it will automatically send out information on who and where you are to all the boats within VHF range as well as the Coast Guard.
- **Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) and Personal Location Beacons (PLB)** are types of distress beacons that alert Search and Rescue of an emergency distress. EPIRBs will self-activate if they encounter water. PLBs are manually activated and held out of the water to transmit. We would suggest a PLB for your ditch bag and an EPIRB for the boat.



Life Jacket



EPIRB



VHF Marine Radio



Satellite Phone

- **Ditch bags and other safety equipment as mentioned in our [Welcome to the Boating Lifestyle Guide](#).** Ditch Bags include the gear you would want while on a safety raft. The best type of bag to use is one that is a bright color, waterproof and floats. In your bag, you'll want to carry an EPIRB or PLB, handheld VHF radio, handheld GPS, batteries, visual rescue signals, a first aid kit, food, and water.
- **Satellite phones** keep you connected when you are out of VHF or cell phone range and offer clear transmission even when conditions are poor (for example, in heavy fog).

- **Safety rafts or life rafts** are used as a last resort when you have to “abandon ship” in an emergency. When buying a raft, you can choose between a “less than 24 hours” raft kit and a “more than 24 hours” raft kit. Which one you choose is largely dependent on how far you think you'll be from shore.

- **A kill lanyard or kill switch** is designed to stop the boat if the captain goes overboard. The kill lanyard is attached to both the captain and the boat. If the captain goes overboard, the kill lanyard releases from the boat and the engine is killed. We recommend storing an extra kill lanyard in the control box. That way, if the captain goes overboard, someone else on board can use the extra kill lanyard to start the boat and get the captain out of the water. **As of April 1, 2021, wearing your kill lanyard is required by law for any motorized boat with 3 or more horsepower that is less than 26 feet in length.**





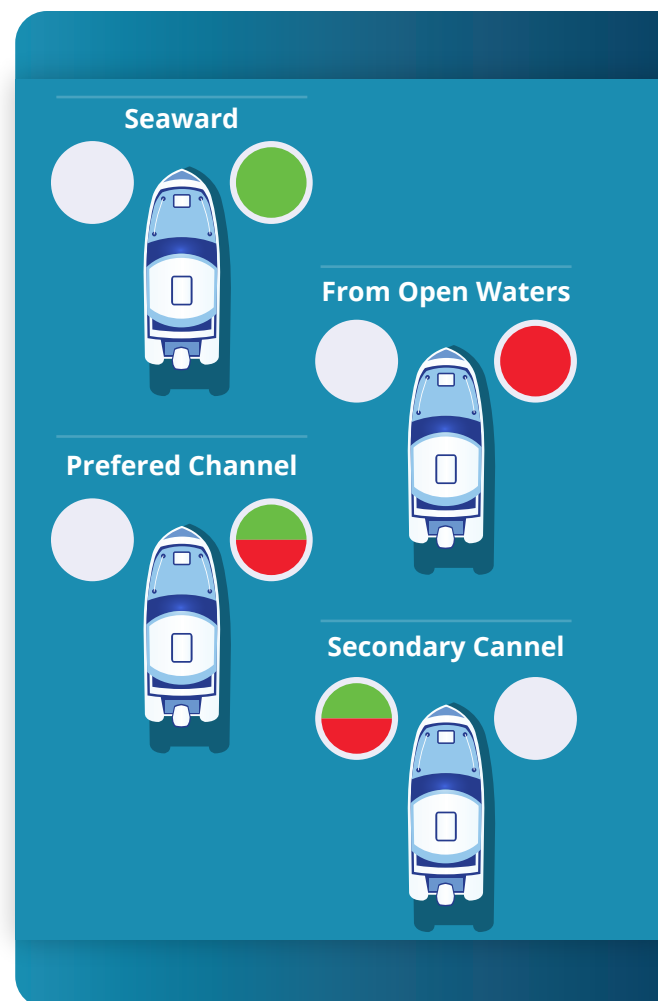
## Rules of the Water

### Navigation Aids and Markers

The U.S. Aids to Navigation System or IALA-B is used in most of the U.S. to show the routes you should follow. Keep in mind:

- Green colors and lights should be on your right (starboard) side when traveling toward open waters (seaward).
- Red colors and lights should be on your right side when traveling from open waters.
- Horizontal bands of both red and green mark a channel junction. The top color indicates the direction of the preferred channel. For example, if green is the top color on the right side of your boat as you are headed to open water, you are in the preferred channel. If it's to your left, you are in the secondary channel.

Orange-and-white Aids are for warnings and regulation. For example, a speed zone.



### Other Visual Signals

Look out for flags on boats. An “alpha flag” (white and blue) is flown by vessels to show all others should yield the right of way. Diving boats may fly this flag along with a “diver down” flag (red and white) to signal a diver is in the water.

Divers may also be marked by surface marker buoys (SMBs). If you suspect a diver is in the water, stay 300 feet away in open water and at least 100 feet away in inlets and navigational channels.

*Remember to always keep situational awareness: the absence of flags doesn't mean an absence of danger.*

## Tips for Navigating

To overtake a boat in front of you or to pass a boat coming towards you, take the following action:

- Signal your intentions to the other boat:
  - Passing starboard (to the right): Whistle or blast horn twice and wait for the same response back from the boat you are passing.
  - Passing portside (to the left): Whistle or blast horn one and wait for the same response back from the boat you are passing.
- Maintain course and speed while overtaking or being overtaken.

## Right-of-Way

- Sailboats, kayaks, SUPs, canoes, etc. all have the right-of-way over a powerboat.
- A vessel that has limited maneuvering ability (due to size, etc.) has the right of way.
- If a boat approaches you from the right, it has the right-of-way.

## Boating Laws

Before you hit the water, make sure you know the rules.

Florida's boating laws can be found in chapters 327 and 328 of Florida Statutes (<http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes>) and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has a summary of those laws at [myfwc.com](http://myfwc.com). Here are a few highlights.

- **Registration:** We will handle registering your boat for you but please be aware that Florida registration takes a few weeks and, if your vessel requires it, US Coast Guard registration can take several months.
- **Life Jackets:** Everyone on board must have a personal flotation device or PFD. The PFD has to be the correct size, in serviceable condition and within easy access. Kids under 6 need to wear their life jacket anytime the boat isn't anchored, moored, or aground.
- **Kill Lanyards:** we mentioned kill lanyards above and how they're used in the event the captain goes overboard. As of April 1, 2021, it's required by law to wear your kill lanyard (also known as an Engine Cut-Off Switch) when operating a vessel with 3 or more horsepower that is less than 26 feet in length.
- **Alcohol/Drugs:** It is a violation of Florida law to operate a vessel while impaired by alcohol or other drugs.

- **Accidents:** If you are in a boating accident call the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the sheriff of the county in which the accident occurred, or the police chief of the municipality in which the accident occurred.
- **Manatees:** If you hit a manatee while boating, call FWC immediately. Manatees are protected by state and federal law and it is illegal to do anything that disrupts a manatee's normal behavior. It is illegal to harass, hunt, capture or kill any marine mammal.

Keep in mind that law enforcement can stop you to conduct resource inspections, ensuring you are following the law.



## Preparing for A Boat Day

### Trailer your Boat Correctly

Before you set off on the water, make sure you have all your equipment ready! If you don't have a trailer yet, we'd be happy to set you up with the perfect trailer for your budget and boating needs.

Before you connect your trailer to your vehicle secure boat tie downs, distribute weight evenly throughout the boat, tie down loose items and ensure the boat is centered on the trailer.

Then, back your vehicle toward the trailer coupler. When the hitch ball is under the trailer coupler, lower the coupler onto the hitch ball and lock the safety pin. Finally, connect the trailer light cable and the safety chains (in an "X" pattern) to your vehicle. Before you go, check that trailer lights and brakes are working.

Before launching your boat into the water, unhook the winch cable from the boat bow eye.

## Check the Weather Forecast

One of the most important actions to take before setting off on a boating trip is to check the weather.

Once you are out on the water, you should continue to look out for signs of changing weather that may not have been predicted in the forecast. Here are our tips before you go and while you're out on the water.

### ***Before you go:***

- Check the weather forecast.
  - Most local news stations include a boater's forecast on their newscast and on their website.
  - You can find the latest marine forecast and warning information from [www.weather.gov/marine](http://www.weather.gov/marine).
- Plan for conditions above and below the predicted forecast ranges.
- Bring a marine VHF transceiver with built-in NOAA Weather Radio channels (see the top section "Top Safety Equipment").

### ***While you're out:***

- Watch for approaching bad weather: darkening clouds, rough or changing winds, or sudden temperature changes.
- If bad weather is approaching, head for shore.

## Create a Float Plan

A float plan isn't the most glamorous of things to prepare for ahead of your boat day, but it is necessary. It informs people about where you plan to go, what time you plan to be there, who will be with you, etc. in the event of an emergency.

The Coast Guard offers a float plan form that we recommend leaving with the marina dockmaster or a friend/family member so they may contact the Coast Guard in case of an emergency.

Visit <https://floatplancentral.cgaux.org/download/USCGFloatPlan.pdf> to download a form that you can fill out each time you plan to take your boat out.



# Ready to Launch!

*Your safety is our priority. If you have any questions about your boat or its safety equipment, give us a call. We look forward to seeing you on the water!*



## Appendix

### Safety Phone Numbers

When you're on or near shore, your cell phone can be a handy tool to have for a variety of situations. Here are a few numbers to store on your phone and when to use them.

**9-1-1:** Call for life-threatening emergencies, keep in mind you are likely only in service when you are within a mile of shore.

**Fish Tale Boats (239-463-4448):** Call us for mobile boat service (ex. an unexpected engine issue). If you are stranded on the water and need a tow, arrange for a sea tow service.

**U.S. Coast Guard, Ft. Myers Beach (239-463-5754):** In case of an emergency or to report suspicious/criminal activity that is currently occurring.

**America's Waterway Watch (877-24-WATCH):** report suspicious activity.

**Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (888-404-3922):** report a crime against Florida's fish, wildlife or natural resources.

**Non-emergent line for your local police department:** Have this number ready for non-emergent issues (like a minor boating accident with no injuries or a fender bender at the dock).

**Insurance agent:** In case of an accident that causes damage to your boat or vehicle, call your insurance agent.