



## BOATING REQUIREMENTS IN SELECTED STATES

By: Janet Kaminski Leduc, Senior Legislative Attorney

### ISSUES

What are the requirements and age restrictions for operating a boat or personal watercraft in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island? What are some potential options for strengthening Connecticut's boating requirements?

### SUMMARY

In the selected states, the requirements and age restrictions for operating boats and personal watercraft (e.g., jet ski) vary, as described in the report below. For example, the minimum age to operate a power boat in Connecticut and Massachusetts without adult supervision is 12. New York's minimum age is 10, New Jersey's is 13, and there is no minimum age in Rhode Island.

Connecticut lawmakers could make various changes to strengthen Connecticut's boating requirements. For example, the legislature could:

1. increase the minimum age for operating a boat without adult supervision;
2. require minors or new holders of boating certificates to only operate with adult supervision until a specified age or a certain period of time has elapsed;
3. mandate additional education beyond the eight hour classroom instruction; or
4. restrict the types, power, or size of boats that children may operate without adult supervision.

## **CONNECTICUT**

### ***Boating Certificate and Education***

To operate a boat in Connecticut, a resident must generally possess either a valid vessel operator license issued by the U.S. Coast Guard or a boating certificate issued by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) commissioner ([CGS § 15-140e](#)).

DEEP issues two types of boating certificates: a Safe Boating Certificate (SBC) and a Certificate of Personal Watercraft Operation (CPWO). An SBC allows the holder to operate boats only. A CPWO allows the holder to operate boats and personal watercraft (PWC) ([CGS §§ 15-140e](#) and [15-140j](#)). Under Connecticut law, a PWC is an inboard powered vessel less than 16 feet in length that (1) has an internal combustion engine powering a water-jet pump as its primary source of motor propulsion and (2) is designed to be operated by a person sitting, standing, or kneeling on the vessel ([CGS § 15-140j](#)).

To obtain an SBC, an applicant must (1) successfully complete a safe boating operation course approved by the DEEP commissioner or (2) pass an equivalency examination administered by the commissioner testing his or her knowledge of safe boating operation ([CGS § 15-140e\(b\)](#)). The safe boating course must include a minimum of eight hours of classroom instruction, followed by a proctored examination of at least 50 questions. The minimum passing score is 80% ([Conn. Agencies Regs. §§ 15-140-f-1 and -2](#)).

To obtain a CPWO, an applicant must (1) successfully complete a combined course in safe boating operation and safe PWC handling approved by the DEEP commissioner; (2) have, or have met the requirements for, an SBC and successfully complete a safe PWC handling course approved by the commissioner; or (3) successfully pass an equivalency examination administered by the commissioner testing his or her knowledge of safe boating operation and safe PWC handling ([CGS § 15-140j\(c\)](#)). A CPWO applicant who has an SBC must take a supplementary safe PWC handling course (which is a two-hour course, according to DEEP), take an examination of at least 10 questions, and receive a minimum passing score of 80%. A CPWO applicant who does not have an SBC must take a combined safe boating and PWC handling course, take an examination of at least 50 questions, and receive a minimum passing score of 80% ([Conn. Agencies Regs. § 15-140j-2](#)).

In practice, according to DEEP, the department offers and most people take the combined safe boating and PWC handling course. This consists of eight hours of classroom instruction followed by a proctored examination.

### ***Age Restrictions***

A person must be at least age 12 and hold an SBC or a CPWO to operate a motor powered boat exceeding 10 horsepower. Younger people who hold an SBC or CPWO may operate such a boat if accompanied by someone at least age 18 who holds an SBC ([CGS §§ 15-140h](#) and [15-140e](#)).

A Connecticut resident who is less than age 16 and who does not have an SBC or a CPWO may operate a boat if he or she is under the direct supervision of someone at least age 18 who holds an SBC and has held it for at least two years ([CGS § 15-140e\(a\)](#)).

Any Connecticut resident operating a PWC, regardless of age, must possess a CPWO ([CGS § 15-140j\(b\)](#)). Out-of-state residents operating a PWC, regardless of age, must possess a Connecticut CPWO or an equivalent certificate from a reciprocal state ([CGS § 15-140j\(f\)](#)). Connecticut recognizes certificates from New York, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island, according to DEEP.

A person must be at least age 16 to operate a PWC ([CGS § 15-140j\(b\)](#)). But, someone younger than age 16 may operate a PWC if under the onboard supervision of someone at least age 18 who holds a CPWO ([Conn. Agencies Regs. § 15-121-A15\(a\)\(6\)](#)).

## **MASSACHUSETTS**

### ***Boating Safety Certificate and Education***

In Massachusetts, boating education is mandatory only for certain children. Children between age 12 and 15 can operate a motorboat without adult supervision only if they successfully complete a boating safety course and possess a boating safety certificate. The course must be approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators. Additionally, those who are age 16 or 17 must complete the course in order to operate a PWC (M.G.L.A. 90B § 9B and 323 CMR 2.08 and 4.03). Children who complete the classroom course and pass a written examination receive a boating safety certificate.

### ***Age Restrictions***

No person less than age 12 may operate a motorboat unless accompanied and directly supervised by a competent person age 18 or older (323 CMR 2.08). A person must be at least age 16 to operate a PWC (M.G.L.A. 90B § 9A).

## **NEW JERSEY**

### ***Boating Safety Certificate and Education***

In New Jersey, in order to operate a power boat or a PWC, a person must possess a boating safety certificate. To obtain a certificate, a person must successfully complete a mandatory boating safety course. The course must (1) consist of at least eight hours of instruction, at least six of which must be in the classroom, and (2) conclude with a closed-book, written, proctored examination. The course must be approved by the Superintendent of State Police in the Department of Law and Public Safety (N.J.S.A. §§ 12:7-60 & -61 and N.J.A.C. § 13:61-1.7).

### ***Age Restrictions***

A person must be at least age 16 and possess a boating safety certificate to operate a power boat or PWC. Except, a person between the ages of 13 and 16 who has completed an approved boating safety course (and therefore possesses a boating safety certificate) may operate a boat (1) powered by an electric motor or (2) 12 feet or longer with less than 10 horsepower (N.J.S.A. § 12:7-61).

## **NEW YORK**

### ***Boating Safety Certificate and Education***

In New York, a person who wants to operate a boat or PWC generally must hold a boating safety certificate. To obtain a certificate, a person must complete an eight-hour classroom course and pass an examination (N.Y. Navigation Law §§ 49 and 78).

### ***Age Restrictions***

A person must be at least age 10 to operate a mechanically propelled boat, unless accompanied by someone at least age 18 who holds a boating safety certificate or is not required to hold one (e.g., a boating safety instructor).

A person must be at least age 14 to operate a PWC, unless accompanied by someone at least age 18 who holds a boating safety certificate (N.Y. Navigation Law § 49).

## **RHODE ISLAND**

### ***Boating Certificate of Completion and Education***

In Rhode Island, no one (1) is allowed to operate a PWC and (2) if born after January 1, 1986, is allowed to operate a boat exceeding 10 horsepower, unless he or she has completed a boating safety education course approved by the Department of Environmental Management director and the National Association of

State Boating Law Administrators and passed a written, proctored examination of at least 25 questions with a score of at least 70%. Those who pass will be issued a certificate of completion (i.e., boating certificate) (R.I. Gen. Laws § 46-22-9.8).

### ***Age Restrictions***

Rhode Island does not require a minimum age to operate boats or PWCs, according to the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

For additional information about boating laws in the selected states, see the following links:

Connecticut:

[http://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2686&q=322292&deepNav\\_GID=1620](http://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2686&q=322292&deepNav_GID=1620)

Massachusetts:

<http://www.mass.gov/eea/grants-and-tech-assistance/enforcement/environmental-police/boat-and-recreation-vehicle-safety-bureau/massachusetts-boating-law-summary.html>

New Jersey:

<http://www.state.nj.us/mvc/pdf/Licenses/021606-boating-safety-manual.pdf>

New York:

<http://www.nysparks.com/recreation/boating/documents/NYSBoatersGuide.pdf>

Rhode Island:

<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/enforce/boatreq.htm>

JKL:ts