



U.S. Coast Guard & Watercraft Division Boat Safety Checklist

This checklist includes the required safety items for recreational boats per U.S. Coast Guard and most State Watercraft Division regulations. Ensure all items are present, functional, and meet current legal standards before boating.

Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs)

- ☐ One USCG-approved PFD per person on board
- ☐ Must be wearable, proper size, and in good condition
- ☐ Type I, II, or III required (Type V must be worn to count)
- ☐ Children under 13 must wear a life jacket while underway (varies by state)
- ☐ Throwable device (Type IV) required for vessels 16 ft or longer

Fire Extinguishers

- ☐ USCG-approved and in serviceable condition
- ☐ <26 ft: 1 B-I extinguisher
- ☐ 26–40 ft: 2 B-I or 1 B-II
- ☐ 40–65 ft: 3 B-I or 1 B-I + 1 B-II

Visual Distress Signals (VDS)

- ☐ Required on coastal waters, Great Lakes, or high seas
- ☐ Day & night signals for boats 16 ft or more
- ☐ Acceptable: Flares (unexpired), Orange flag (day), Electric SOS light (night)

Sound-Producing Device

- ☐ Whistle, horn, or bell required on all boats
- ☐ <39.4 ft: Whistle or horn
- ☐ >39.4 ft: Also requires a bell

Navigation Lights

- ☐ Required between sunset and sunrise or limited visibility
- ☐ Red/green bow lights and white stern or all-around light
- ☐ Canoes/kayaks: Flashlight or lantern

Backfire Flame Arrestor

- ☐ Required for gasoline engines (except outboards)
- ☐ Must be USCG-approved and clean

Ventilation

- ☐ Required on gasoline-powered boats with enclosed engines
- ☐ Two ventilation ducts or powered blower fan required

Registration and Numbers

- ☐ Boat must be registered with valid numbers and decals displayed
- ☐ Registration certificate must be onboard

Boating Safety Certificate

- ☐ Required in many states for operators born after a certain date

Marine Sanitation Device (MSD)

- ☐ Required for boats with installed toilets
- ☐ Must be USCG-approved Type I, II, or III depending on waterway

Oil & Garbage Placards (for boats >26 ft)

- ☐ Oil discharge placard (5"x8")
- ☐ Garbage discharge placard (4"x9")

Navigation Rules Book (for boats ≥39.4 ft)


- ☐ Copy of Navigation Rules must be onboard

Anchor and Line (Recommended)

- ☐ Not required by USCG but often recommended or required by states

Bailer or Manual Bilge Pump

- ☐ Recommended for non-self-bailing small vessels (canoes/kayaks)

 **TIP:** Check local laws for any state-specific requirements.