

WATER & OUTDOORS

Boating Safety Checklist

Use this pre-departure check for every trip. Confirm requirements for your boat and the waters you will use.

Wear a properly fitted, U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket. A stored jacket cannot protect you when you unexpectedly enter the water.

People and trip plan

- Identify a sober operator and a backup person who understands basic controls and how to call for help. Keep the load within the vessel's capacity.
- Leave a float plan with a trusted person ashore: boat description, people aboard, route, launch point, expected return, and instructions for an overdue return.

Boat and equipment

- Check fuel, battery, steering, controls, drain plugs, and the bilge system. Address leaks or mechanical problems before launch. Secure loose gear and inspect lines.
- Check applicable life-jacket, throwable-device, fire-extinguisher, navigation-light, sound-signal, registration, and distress-signal requirements. Inspect condition and expiration dates where relevant; equipment rules vary by vessel and trip.

Conditions and navigation

- Check the forecast, warnings, river conditions, ramp access, and closures. Postpone the trip when conditions exceed the boat's or operator's capability.
- Carry an appropriate chart or map and a way to identify your location. Stay out of restricted dam areas and give commercial traffic room to operate.

Passenger briefing

- Show everyone how to fit a life jacket, where emergency equipment is stored, and how to contact help. Keep a charged communication device protected from water.
- Carry drinking water, needed medication, first-aid supplies, and protection from cold, rain, and sun. Watch conditions and return early when the weather or water deteriorates.

Sources & further guidance

[Iowa DNR: Boating laws and safety](http://www.iowadnr.gov) | www.iowadnr.gov

[Iowa DNR: Safe on the water](http://www.iowadnr.gov) | www.iowadnr.gov

[U.S. Coast Guard: Federal recreational boating requirements](http://www.uscg.mil) | www.uscg.mil