A checklist of the most important boating safety equipment.



Boating safety isn't just about what you do, it also depends on what you take with you. Before you leave the dock, make sure you're stocked with these key boating safety items.

Boating safety equipment required by law:

- **Life jackets.** Also known as personal flotation devices (PFDs), life jackets are required for every person on board, according to federal and state laws. So, if you have 10 people on board, you must have at least 10 life jackets available. Most New England states also require children under a certain age to wear their life jackets at all times while on board. Anyone being towed behind your boat (water skiers, etc.) must wear a life jacket as well.

  Choose Coast Guard-approved life jackets. For help in selecting the right life jackets for your family, visit the Coast Guard's website.

- **Throwable flotation device.** The most familiar throwable flotation device is the life ring, which has a rope attached to help tow overboard passengers back to the boat. There are also flotation devices that double as cushions for boat seating. Throwable devices are recommended for all boats and are required by law for boats over a certain size. For example, in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, boats longer than 16 feet must have at least one throwable flotation device on board.

- **Fire extinguisher.** Depending on the size of your boat, you'll need at least one B-1 type fire extinguisher on board. Larger boats may require multiple B-1 and/or B-2 type extinguishers. You can

read a full explanation of the required fire extinguishers for boat use here. Make sure everyone on board knows how to operate the extinguisher in case of an emergency.

- **Visual Distress Signals.** These include aerial flares, smoke signals, electric lights, and flags (for daytime use). Regulations vary by state, the size of your boat, and the waters in which you're boating, but most boats are required to have at least some of the nighttime devices, and larger ones need both daytime and nighttime signals. You can visit Boat U.S. Foundation's website for a more detailed explanation of which devices are required for your boat.

- **Sound Devices.** Nearly all boats are required to have some type of sound signaling device, such as a bell, whistle, or air horn. Boats between 39.4 and 65.6 feet in length are required to have both a bell and a whistle. Besides signaling others for help, sound devices can be used for navigation to alert other boats of your intentions. Sound devices can be especially helpful in foggy conditions when visual distress signals may be less effective.

Federal requirements for boating safety equipment, listed according to boat size, can be accessed at the Boat U.S. Foundation's website. Keep in mind that some state requirements go above and beyond federal regulations, so be aware of your state rules when equipping your boat.

Additional safety equipment not required by law but still important:

- First aid kit
- Anchor with line
- Alternate propulsion devices (paddles or oars to use if your boat's engine fails)
- VHF radio to call for help (cell service may not be available)
- Spare batteries for battery-operated devices
- Flashlight
- Toolkit

The right safety equipment can give you greater peace of mind on the water; so can having a good insurance policy for your boat. An independent, local agent can help you get the best one for you. With everything in place, you can relax and enjoy a summer of boating fun with your family.