

To enhance boating safety and compliance in Illinois, familiarize yourself with the new boating rules:

1. All boaters must complete a safety course to operate motorized vessels.
2. Life jackets are required for all passengers, with specific regulations for children.
3. Boating under the influence laws have been tightened, with stricter penalties.
4. New restrictions on wake zones to protect wildlife and reduce shoreline erosion.
5. Mandatory use of navigation lights during twilight and nighttime operations.
6. Increased fines for littering and improper waste disposal in waterways.

First, make sure your boat is properly registered. Check your expiration date and renew on time. Second, get your Boating Safety Certificate if you were born after January 1, 1998.

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Engine Cut-Off Switch Requirements

Here's a newer rule that surprises a lot of people. If your boat has an installed Engine Cut-Off Switch, you must use it.

This applies to motorized boats with 3 horsepower or more and less than 26 feet in length. The ECOS link is usually a coiled lanyard that clips to your clothing or life jacket.

If you fall overboard, the engine cuts off automatically. This prevents the boat from circling back and hitting you. Makes sense, right?

Do You Need a License to Operate a Boat?

Here's the deal. Illinois doesn't require a traditional boating license, like a driver's license. But there's a catch.

If you were born on or after January 1, 1998, you need a Boating Safety Certificate. This applies to anyone operating a powered watercraft with 10 horsepower or more.

The certificate is good for life. You take the course once, pass the test, and you're done. Pretty straightforward.

You must carry this certificate with you whenever you're operating a boat. Law enforcement can ask to see it at any time. Not having it on you can result in a fine.