



More on Personal Watercraft Safety

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Introduction

As noted in PE *Speed Gram* 3-98 (1 Aug. 1998), the *United States Coast Guard Auxiliary* (USCGAUX) is increasing its emphasis on *Personal Watercraft* (PWC) education. This action is being taken in response to recent PWC accident statistics and the recommendations of the *National Transportation Safety Board* (NTSB). As part of this emphasis:

-USCGAUX instructors are required to highlight relevant information on PWC in *all* basic boating safety courses. This includes the *Boating Safety Course* (BSC), the *Boating Skills and Seamanship* (BS&S) course, the new *Sailing Fundamentals* (SF) course, the one-lesson PWC course, and our youth course, *Boats, Water, 'N Kids. Basic Coastal Navigation* (BCN) and *Advanced Coastal Navigation* (ACN) are exempted from this requirement, because these are not basic boating safety courses, *per se*. (This said, BCN and ACN instructors are urged to mention unique PWC operating characteristics, such as lack of steering when the throttle is at idle, in appropriate context.)

-Additional PWC-relevant guidance will be developed for all USCGAUX courses. This *Speed Gram*, for example, presents corrections and additions to the 11th Edition of the BS&S course.

-New editions of all USCGAUX courses will incorporate additional material on PWC when these are issued.

The BS&S 11th Edition

As part of the USCGAUX's increased emphasis on personal watercraft and the evolving requirements of the *National Association of State Boating Law Administrators* (NASBLA), the following changes to the BS&S 11th Edition should be made. Please note that these changes are in addition to those listed in PE *Speed Gram* Number 8-96 (1 Sept. 1996), copies of which are packed in each case of BS&S textbooks.

FSOs-PE and course supervisors are requested to bring the following items to the attention of their instructors and to see that each item is included in the instruction given BS&S students.

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-Specific Changes to the BS&S 11th Edition

Chapter 1:

Page 1-8, left column, insert new paragraph after the 3rd paragraph to say, "PWCs are classed as motor vessels by the United States Coast Guard. As vessels, they must obey the laws and regulations which govern all powered vessels. These include safety equipment, registration, numbering, Navigation Rules, and others. You will learn more about these subjects in subsequent chapters."

Chapter 2:

Page 2-1, left column, at end of the 3rd paragraph add, "Remember, a PWC is a motor vessel governed by these laws and regulations, just as any other motor vessel."

Page 2-10, right column, at end of Type III PFD discussion, insert the following new paragraph: "The operator and passengers aboard must wear PFDs. These are usually Type III. The U.S. Coast Guard strongly recommends that these be 'high impact PFDs,' with impact ratings of 50 miles per hour. The printing on the PFD will tell you if it is rated for high impact."

Page 2-11, right, insert the following two paragraphs between the 2nd and 3rd paragraphs:

"The methods of inflation and their inherent buoyancy make hybrids undesirable for some purposes. Boaters, such as water skiers and PWC operators, who frequently end up in the water find hybrids with automatic inflation undesirable since they inflate whenever they are immersed in water.

Hybrids with manual inflation devices are also poor choices for water skiers and PWC operators. These boaters frequently find themselves in the water under conditions in which they cannot inflate manually or orally inflatable hybrids. Likewise, the minimal inherent buoyancy of hybrids argues against their use by these boaters. Hybrids are more desirable for use on cruising and fishing boats where they afford more freedom of movement than other life jackets. The *National Association of State Boating Law Administrators* (NASBLA) model act for operation of PWC contains a suggested provision that 'no person aboard a PWC shall use an inflatable personal flotation device to meet the PFD requirement. States are likely to consider this recommendation carefully.'

Page 2-14, left, 1st paragraph. Insert after "All boats" the following: ",including PWCs," to read "All boats, including PWCs, are required to carry some means of making an efficient sound signal."

Page 2-20, left, following the 4th paragraph, insert the following paragraph: "In most states, a PWC must have a kill switch unless the PWC is designed to circle back to its operator when the operator falls overboard. A kill switch must be fastened to the operator by means of a lanyard whenever the vessel is in operation."

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Chapter 4:

Page 4-2, left, after the 3rd paragraph, add a paragraph to state, "Observe the same precautions with PWCs as those recommended for larger vessels. Fuel leaks can lead to fires and gasoline fumes can be explosive. Check the motor compartment for fumes and leaks."

Page 4-8, left column, after the 2nd paragraph in section on "JET DRIVES," insert the following paragraph:

"Since jet drive boats, including PWC, steer by turning their jet nozzles, they do not have rudders. This means they must have pump power to have steering control. If you throttle back or shut off a PWC's engine or have a power failure during a turn, you lose steering control--*in effect you have become a passenger, rather than an operator.* The PWC will not continue to turn. Instead, it will continue forward in the general direction in which it was moving before the loss of power. This causes many PWC accidents. For example, if the PWC is close to a pier or another vessel when power is reduced, it may crash into the pier or vessel."

Page 4-21, left, at bottom of column, add the following paragraph:

"Use of PWCs for towing skiers entails risks that should be carefully considered by the PWC operator and skier alike. In place or proposed PWC legislation may require that an observer (rear facing) is required and, moreover, that the PWC have sufficient seating (and weight) capacity to accommodate the operator, observer, and each person being towed. The rear-facing observer faces additional risks because he/she cannot see the water ahead and anticipate waves or wakes and may find it difficult to avoid falling into the water."

Chapter 6:

Page 6-3, right, delete last sentence and add the following paragraph:

"All vessels, and PWCs in particular, should avoid passing in front of other vessels including barges and other large vessels. Large vessels move faster than you may think. A deep draft vessel travelling at a speed of 10 knots, covers about 1,000 feet in one minute. It is tempting for a PWC to jump the wake of another vessel. This can be an extremely dangerous practice, not only because the rider can be thrown overboard, but also because large vessels operating in relatively shallow waters can often turn up submerged debris which poses a collision hazard. Various states have passed laws to limit this practice (e.g., no wake jumping within a specified number of feet from the vessel causing the wake)."

Page 6-13, following the 1st paragraph under the heading "VESSEL LIGHTS AND SHAPES," insert the following paragraph:

"Since PWCs are not equipped with lights, they must not operate at night. To do so is both foolish (because of their small size and high speed PWCs are difficult enough to see in the daytime, let alone at night without lights) and a violation of the Navigation Rules. In

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addition, many states and localities have laws and ordinances prohibiting the operation of PWCs during nighttime hours."

Page 6-20, left, at bottom of column, please insert the following section:

"COURTESY AND SAFETY

Common courtesy and respect for other boaters underlies much of the Navigation Rules. Sound signals illustrate this point of view. A major purpose of the sound signals is to alert other vessel operators to the action you are taking or propose to take. The rules concerning the stand-on status of sailing vessels in relationship to each other and to power vessels serve the same purpose.

Because of courtesy violations, many ordinances and laws have been enacted limiting PWC operations. Public reaction to courtesy violations threatens to further curtail their operation. Weaving in and out of other vessel in a congested area at high speed; operating too close to people who are fishing; making sharp, unpredictable turns; following too closely to water skiers; cutting behind other vessels when vision is obstructed; failure to respect swimming and other restricted areas; steering toward another vessel or person; and other actions constitute reckless operation. These actions are also violations of common courtesy, and threaten to give rise to further restrictive legislation."