



Inspecting your pleasure craft

Better a few minutes of delay onshore than hours of waiting in an uncomfortable or dangerous situation. Knowingly operating a pleasure craft that is unseaworthy is a criminal offence. Your pleasure craft, its engine and equipment must be properly maintained (in good working order).

A surprising number of pleasure craft are stranded each year due to running out of fuel. More than 50 per cent of calls for assistance are from boaters in trouble as a result of the mechanical failure of their vessels.



Pleasure Craft Courtesy Checks

Courtesy checks are offered free-of-charge by Transport Canada and, in some areas of Canada, the Canadian Coast Guard, Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary and other boating and water safety organizations. At your invitation, a qualified professional will board your boat and review with you the safety equipment required by law.

Other equipment will be inspected and any deficiencies identified. There are no penalties for missing equipment and no limit to the number of checks you can request. Arranging for a check every spring is a good idea. Visit www.boatingsafety.gc.ca for more information.



Pre-departure checklists

Recreational boating should be fun, safe and hassle-free. No matter if you own, rent or are borrowing a pleasure craft, make sure it is in good working order and properly equipped before heading out on the water.

Inspect your pleasure craft:

- Inspect your pleasure craft's hull and check for cracks or other damage.
- If you are operating a power-driven pleasure craft check its electrical, fuel, propulsion and cooling systems and make sure the throttle is operating smoothly and is not sticking or binding.
- Make sure the steering is working properly.
- Check the oil and fuel levels. A good rule of thumb for fuel is: one-third for the trip out, one-third for the return and one-third as reserve.
- Check all hoses and lines for leaks or cracks and replace if necessary. Make sure all clamps and belts are secure and in good shape.
- Inspect, clean and replace spark plugs if necessary.
- Check and change oil and water filters if necessary.
- Check the battery's charge and its fluid levels.
- Be certain the drainage plug is in place.
- Verify the load on your boat is well distributed.

Make sure your pleasure craft has what it needs for a safe trip:

- Are there enough flotation devices of appropriate size for everyone on board?
- Is all of the required equipment in good working order?
- Do you have ample reserves of fuel for the trip or will you need to refuel?
- Do you have maps and charts?
- Is your VHF radio working properly?
- Do you have a first aid kit, basic tools and spare parts?

Take a minute to consider your safety preparedness:

- Have you checked the weather forecast?
- Are there any local hazards or boating restrictions?
- Have you filed a sail plan to let someone know where you are going, when to expect you back and what your boat looks like?

Owners and operators of pleasure craft, including personal watercraft, should brief all guests and future operators about safe operation before heading out. Guests should be told where the safety equipment is kept and how to use it.

Planning on renting out your vessel this season? You may be required to have a rental boat safety checklist on board. Visit www.boatingsafety.gc.ca or contact a Transport Canada Centre for more information.

These are just a few things to consider before setting out. To be properly prepared, take a boating safety course. Doing so can better sensitize you to possible risks and danger on the water.



Making and filing sail plans

A sail plan is a voyage itinerary that includes a travel route and a basic description of your boat. Sail plans are also referred to as trip or float plans. No matter what you call them, all boaters are encouraged to file one before heading out even if it is just for an hour or two.

File your sail plan with a responsible person and instruct them to contact a Rescue Coordination Centre, (see page 67 for telephone numbers) if you are overdue.

If you are taking a long trip you should file a daily position report (especially if your planned route has

changed). To avoid launching an unwarranted search for you, be sure to deactivate the sail plan you filed by reporting that you have returned or completed your trip. Forgetting to do this can result in lost time and resources for Search and Rescue personnel. See page 61 for a sail plan you can photocopy and use.

Avoiding specific hazards

Being prepared goes beyond having your boat and equipment in tip-top shape. Follow these tips:

- Check marine charts for overhead obstacles, bridges or underwater cables you may encounter in the area you will be navigating.
- Read marine charts with related publications like Sailing Directions. Looking at tide tables and current atlases will also help. They may indicate water levels, times of low, slack and high tides and the direction of water flow.
- Stay away from designated swimming areas. Even canoes and kayaks can easily injure swimmers.
- Avoid operating close to shore and look out for diving flags, especially on days when the sun's glare is strong. Diving or snorkelling operations could be taking place beneath you.

Talk to knowledgeable local residents if you are in an area that is not covered by marine charts. They may be able to point out low-head dams, rapids, white water, local wind conditions, currents and areas of rapid build up of high wave conditions.



Monitoring the weather

Understanding weather and water conditions is very important. Operators should seek out current, relevant information before heading out and know how to get updates while on the water. This requires the knowledge and skill to use a marine radio. A receiver for continuous marine weather forecasts is available and distributed through marine equipment supply outlets.

When heading out, make sure the conditions you see match those predicted. Once under way, remember to keep your eye on the sky. If the sky looks dark and cloudy and conditions are changing rapidly, head for shore (check your charts in advance to know where to seek shelter).