

Excerpts from Handbook of Michigan Boating Laws and Responsibilities



On the Water

The following is an overview of Michigan regulations that apply when vessel operators are on the water.

Unlawful and Dangerous Operation

Michigan law designates these dangerous operating practices as illegal.

Reckless Operation of a vessel or reckless manipulation of water skis, a surfboard, or similar device is defined as operation which disregards the safety or rights of others or endangers the person or property of others. Some examples are:

- Weaving your vessel through congested waterway traffic or swerving at the last possible moment in order to avoid collision
- Jumping the wake of another vessel unnecessarily close to the other vessel or when visibility around the other vessel is restricted
- Chasing, harassing, or disturbing wildlife with your vessel
- Causing damage from the wake of your vessel

Failure To Regulate Speed is operating a vessel at speeds that may cause danger to life or property of any other person or at speeds that will not permit you to bring your vessel to a safe stop. It is illegal to operate a vessel:

- In excess of 55 mph unless you are at least one mile offshore on the Great Lakes or Lake St. Clair
- At greater than “slow, no wake speed” when a person is in the bow of a vessel without proper seating
- Faster than is reasonable and prudent under the conditions (weather, vessel traffic, etc.)



- **Improper Distance** is not maintaining a proper distance while operating a vessel or towing a person. To maintain a proper distance when you are operating at greater than “slow, no wake speed” (except in channels that are not posted), the vessel or persons being towed must not be within 100 feet of:
 - A shoreline (if operating in water less than three feet deep)
 - Any moored or anchored vessel
 - A dock or raft
 - Any marked swimming area or person(s) in the water

“Slow, No Wake Speed” means the slowest speed at which it is still possible to maintain steering and which does not create a wake

- **Improper Distance for PWCs** means that, if operating at greater than “slow, no wake speed,” PWCs also must:
 - Stay at least 200 feet from any Great Lakes shoreline.
 - Not cross within 150 feet behind another vessel other than another PWC.
- **Improper Direction** is defined as the failure to operate in a counterclockwise direction except in areas marked by well-defined channels or rivers.
- **Boating in Restricted Areas** is defined as operating within a restricted area clearly marked by buoys, beacons, diver-down flags, etc.
- **Riding on the Bow, Gunwales, or Transom** is allowing passengers to ride on a motorboat in places where there may be a chance of falling overboard. While operating greater than “slow, no wake speed,” persons on a motorboat may not sit, stand, or walk on any portion of a motorboat not designed for that purpose. This includes riding on the gunwale.
- **Insufficient equipment** is operating a vessel that is not carrying, storing, maintaining, and using marine safety equipment on board the vessel as required by the Department of Natural Resources.



Specifically for PWCs

PWC (personal watercraft or “jet ski”) operators must obey additional legal requirements that apply specifically to the operation of personal watercraft on Michigan waters.

Requirements Specific to PWCs

- Each person riding on or being towed behind a PWC must wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved wearable Type I, II, or III PFD. Inflatable PFDs may not be used. See page 28 for PFDs age restrictions.
- You may not allow a child under 7 years of age to ride on or be towed behind a PWC unless with a parent or guardian or designee of the parent or guardian.
- The lanyard of a PWC's ignition safety switch must be attached to the person, clothing, or PFD of the operator.
- It is illegal to operate a PWC during the period that begins at sunset and ends at 8:00 a.m. “Sunset” means that time determined by the national weather service.
- PWCs must be operated in a reasonable and prudent manner at all times. It is illegal to:
 - Jump the wake of another vessel unnecessarily close to the other vessel.
 - Weave your PWC through congested traffic.
 - Swerve at the last possible moment to avoid collision.
- A PWC must be operated at “slow, no wake speed” if crossing within 150 feet behind another vessel unless the other vessel is also a PWC.
- You may not operate a PWC within 200 feet of a Great Lakes shoreline unless traveling at “slow, no wake speed” perpendicular to the shoreline.
- You may not operate a PWC in waters less than two feet deep unless you are operating at “slow, no wake speed” or are docking or launching your PWC.
- It is illegal to harass wildlife or disturb aquatic vegetation with your PWC.