

Boating Safety Checklist

Before heading out on the water, use this checklist to ensure your boat is properly equipped and you are prepared for a safe trip. Boating safety is essential to prevent accidents and respond effectively in emergencies.

1. Essential Equipment

- U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets (PFDs) for all passengers
- Throwable flotation device (cushion or ring buoy)
- Fire extinguisher(s) - make sure they are charged and accessible
- Sound-producing device (whistle, air horn, or bell)
- Visual distress signals (flares, signal mirror, or strobe light)
- Navigation lights (ensure they work properly)
- First aid kit with bandages, antiseptic, and emergency medications
- Tool kit and spare parts (extra fuses, spark plugs, and duct tape)
- Anchor and sufficient rope
- Bailing device (bucket or bilge pump)
- VHF radio or cell phone for emergency communication
- Spare drinking water and food supply in case of emergency
- Sunscreen, hat, and sunglasses for sun protection
- Emergency blanket for warmth in case of extended exposure
- Boat registration, insurance documents, and necessary permits

2. Pre-Departure Checklist

- Check the weather forecast and water conditions before departure
- File a float plan with a family member or friend (departure time, route, return time)
- Inspect fuel levels and ensure you have enough for the trip
- Verify engine operation and check for fuel or oil leaks
- Ensure drain plugs are in place and bilge pumps are working
- Secure all gear to prevent shifting while underway
- Go over safety procedures with all passengers (life jackets, emergency protocols)
- Test the steering and throttle controls for proper operation
- Check battery charge and ensure backup power is available
- Review local boating laws and speed limits in your area
- Ensure all passengers understand emergency radio and distress signals

3. On-the-Water Safety Tips

- Always wear a life jacket - even if you are a strong swimmer
- Maintain a proper lookout for other boats, swimmers, and obstacles
- Follow navigational rules and stay within marked channels
- Avoid alcohol consumption while operating the boat
- Adjust speed according to weather, visibility, and traffic conditions

- Keep a safe distance from other vessels and docks
- Be aware of tides, currents, and underwater hazards
- Never overload your boat beyond its weight capacity
- Secure all passengers and ensure they remain seated while underway
- If an emergency occurs, remain calm and signal for help using your distress equipment
- Have an emergency floatation plan in case of an unexpected water entry

4. Emergency Procedures

- If the boat capsizes, stay with the boat - it provides flotation and visibility
- Use distress signals (flares, whistle, waving arms) to get attention
- If a passenger falls overboard, throw a flotation device immediately
- If stranded, use the radio or cell phone to call for help
- If taking on water, use the bilge pump or bailing device to stay afloat
- If caught in a storm, head to shore if possible; otherwise, anchor and ride it out
- Know the location of all emergency equipment onboard and how to use it
- Ensure passengers know how to use life jackets and flotation devices properly
- Monitor weather conditions throughout your trip and adjust plans accordingly
- Carry an emergency GPS device or locator beacon for search and rescue situations

Remember: Safe Boating Saves Lives!