

§ 75A-13.3. Personal watercraft.

(a) No person shall operate a personal watercraft on the waters of this State at any time between sunset and sunrise. For purposes of this section, "personal watercraft" means a small vessel that uses an outboard or propeller-driven motor, or an inboard motor powering a water jet pump, as its primary source of motive power and which is designed to be operated by a person sitting, standing, or kneeling on, or being towed behind the vessel, rather than in the conventional manner of sitting or standing inside the vessel.

(a1) No person shall operate a personal watercraft on the waters of this State at greater than no-wake speed within 100 feet of an anchored or moored vessel, a dock, pier, swim float, marked swimming area, swimmers, surfers, persons engaged in angling, or any manually operated propelled vessel, unless the personal watercraft is operating in a narrow channel. No person shall operate a personal watercraft in a narrow channel at greater than no-wake speed within 50 feet of an anchored or moored vessel, a dock, pier, swim float, marked swimming area, swimmers, surfers, persons engaged in angling, or any manually operated propelled vessel.

(b) Except as otherwise provided in this subsection, no person under 16 years of age shall operate a personal watercraft on the waters of this State, and it is unlawful for the owner of a personal watercraft or a person who has temporary or permanent responsibility for a person under the age of 16 to knowingly allow that person to operate a personal watercraft. A person of at least 14 years of age but under 16 years of age may operate a personal watercraft on the waters of this State if:

- (1) The person is accompanied by a person of at least 18 years of age who physically occupies the watercraft and who is in compliance with G.S. 75A-16.2; or
- (2) The person (i) possesses on his or her person while operating the watercraft, identification showing proof of age and a boating safety certification card issued by the Commission, proof of other satisfactory completion of a boating safety education course approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA), or proof of other boating safety education in compliance with G.S. 75A-16.2; and (ii) produces that identification and proof upon the request of an officer of the Commission or local law enforcement agency.

(b1) A person who is the lawful owner of a personal watercraft or a person having control of a personal watercraft who knowingly allows a person under 16 years of age to operate a personal watercraft in violation of the provisions of subsection (b) of this section is responsible for an infraction as provided in G.S. 14-3.1.

(c) No livery shall lease, hire, or rent a personal watercraft to or for operation by a person under 16 years of age, except as provided in subsection (b) of this section.

(c1) No person, firm, or corporation shall engage in the business of renting personal watercraft to the public for operation by the rentee unless the person, firm, or corporation has secured insurance for the liability of the person, firm, or corporation and that of the rentee, in such an amount as is hereinafter provided, from an insurance company duly authorized to sell liability insurance in this State. Each personal watercraft rented must be covered by a policy of liability insurance insuring the owner and rentee and their agents and employees while in the performance of their duties against loss from any liability imposed by law for damages including damages for care and loss of services because of bodily injury to or death of any person and injury to or destruction of property caused by accident arising out of the operation of such personal watercraft, subject to the following minimum limits: three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000) per occurrence.

(c2) A vessel livery that fails to carry liability insurance in violation of subsection (c1) of this section is guilty of a Class 2 misdemeanor and shall only be subject to a fine not to exceed one thousand dollars (\$1,000).

(c3) A vessel livery shall provide the operator of a leased personal watercraft with basic safety instruction prior to allowing the operation of the leased personal watercraft. "Basic safety instruction" shall include direction on how to safely operate the personal watercraft and a review of the safety provisions of this section. A vessel livery that fails to provide basic safety instruction is responsible for an infraction as provided in G.S. 14-3.1.

(d) No person shall operate a personal watercraft on the waters of this State, nor shall the owner of a personal watercraft knowingly allow another person to operate that personal watercraft on the waters of this State, unless:

- (1) Each person riding on or being towed behind the vessel is wearing a personal flotation device approved by the United States Coast Guard. Inflatable personal flotation devices do not satisfy this requirement; and
- (2) In the case of a personal watercraft equipped by the manufacturer with a lanyard-type engine cut-off switch, the lanyard is securely attached to the person, clothing, or flotation device of the operator at all times while the personal watercraft is being operated in such a manner to turn off the engine if the operator dismounts while the watercraft is in operation.

(d1) No person shall operate a personal watercraft towing another person on water skis, a surfboard, or similar device unless:

- (1) The personal watercraft has on board, in addition to the operator, an observer who shall monitor the progress of the person or persons being towed, or the personal watercraft is equipped with a rearview mirror; and
- (2) The total number of persons operating, observing, and being towed does not exceed the number of passengers identified by the manufacturer as the maximum safe load for the vessel.

(e) A personal watercraft must at all times be operated in a reasonable and prudent manner. Maneuvers that endanger life, limb, or property shall constitute reckless operation of a vessel as provided in G.S. 75A-10, and include any of the following:

- (1) Unreasonably or unnecessarily weaving through congested vessel traffic.
- (2) Jumping the wake of another vessel within 100 feet of the other vessel or when visibility around the other vessel is obstructed.
- (3) Intentionally approaching another vessel in order to swerve at the last possible moment to avoid collision.
- (4) Repealed by Session Laws 2000-52, s. 2.
- (5) Operating contrary to the "rules of the road" or following too closely to another vessel, including another personal watercraft. For purposes of this subdivision, "following too closely" means proceeding in the same direction and operating at a speed in excess of 10 miles per hour when approaching within 100 feet to the rear or 50 feet to the side of another vessel that is underway unless that vessel is operating in a narrow channel, in which case a personal watercraft may operate at the speed and flow of other vessel traffic.

(f) The provisions of this section do not apply to a performer engaged in a professional exhibition, a person or persons engaged in an activity authorized under G.S. 75A-14, or a person attempting to rescue another person who is in danger of losing life or limb.

(f1) For purposes of this section, "narrow channel" means a segment of the waters of the State 300 feet or less in width.

(g) Repealed by Session Laws 1999-447, s. 1.

(h) Nothing in this section prohibits units of local government, marine commissions, or local lake authorities from regulating personal watercraft pursuant to the provisions of G.S. 160A-176.2 or any other law authorizing such regulation, provided that the regulations are more restrictive than the provisions of this section or regulate aspects of personal watercraft operation that are not covered by this section. Whenever a unit of local government, marine commission, or local lake authority regulates personal watercraft pursuant to this subsection, it shall conspicuously post signs that are reasonably calculated to provide notice to personal watercraft users of the stricter regulations. (1997-129, s. 1; 1999-447, s. 1; 2000-52, ss. 1-4; 2005-161, s. 1; 2006-185, s. 1; 2009-282, s. 2; 2013-360, s. 18B.15(c); 2013-380, ss. 7, 8; 2023-69, s. 2.3.)