

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
SESSION 1999

SESSION LAW 1999-447  
HOUSE BILL 1209

AN ACT TO IMPROVE BOATING SAFETY BY AMENDING THE STATE LAW REGULATING PERSONAL WATERCRAFT OPERATION TO CONFORM WITH THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE BOATING LAW ADMINISTRATORS AND TO OTHERWISE IMPROVE PERSONAL WATERCRAFT SAFETY.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

Section 1. G.S. 75A-13.3 reads as rewritten:

**"§ 75A-13.3. Personal watercraft.**

(a) No person shall operate a personal watercraft on the waters of this State at any time between ~~the hours from one hour after sunset to one hour before~~ and sunrise. For purposes of this section, "personal watercraft" means a small vessel which 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 ~~vehicle.~~ 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, ~~nor shall 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 a person under the age of 16 that person to operate a personal watercraft. A person of at least ~~13~~ 12 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 ~~16~~ 18 years of age who physically occupies the watercraft; or
- (2) The person (i) ~~possesses a boating safety certificate or a photographic identification card certifying that the person has completed a boating safety course approved by the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary.~~ on his or her person while operating the watercraft, identification showing proof of age and a boater safety certification card issued by the Wildlife Resources Commission or proof of other satisfactory completion of a boating safety education course approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA); and (ii) produces that identification and certification card

upon the request of an officer of the Wildlife Resources Commission or local law enforcement agency.

(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) It shall be unlawful for any person, firm, or corporation to engage in the business of renting personal watercraft to the public for operation by the rentee unless such person, firm, or corporation has secured insurance for his own liability and that of his rentee, in such an amount as is hereinafter provided, from an insurance company duly authorized to sell liability insurance in this State. Each such 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.

(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 such vessel is wearing a type I, type II, type III, or type V personal flotation device approved by the United States Coast Guard; 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 or other devices 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, including: property~~ shall constitute reckless operation of a vessel as provided in G.S. 75A-10, and include:

- (1) Unreasonably or unnecessarily weaving through congested vessel traffic;

- (2) ~~Jumping the wake of another vessel unreasonably or unnecessarily close of within 100 feet of such other vessel or when visibility around such other vessel is obstructed; and~~
- (3) ~~Intentionally approaching another vessel in order to swerve at the last possible moment to avoid collision-collision;~~
- (4) Operating at greater than no-wake speed within 100 feet of an anchored or moored vessel, the shoreline, a dock, pier, swim float, marked swimming area, swimmers, surfers, persons engaged in angling, or any manually operated propelled vessel; and
- (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.

~~shall constitute reckless operation of a vessel as provided in G.S. 75A-10.~~

(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.

~~(g) This section applies only to that portion of the waters of the upper Catawba River found within Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Iredell, Lincoln, McDowell, and Mecklenburg Counties, beginning where the US Highway 221 bridge crosses the Catawba River in McDowell County and extending downstream to the Cowans Ford Dam. The provisions of G.S. 75A-13.2 shall not apply to the region covered by this section.~~

(h) Nothing in this section prohibits units of local government, marine commissions, or local wake 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 wake 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."

Section 2. G.S. 75A-18 is amended by adding a new subsection to read:

"(c1) Any boat livery that fails to carry liability insurance in violation of G.S. 75A-13.3(c1) shall be guilty of a Class 2 misdemeanor and shall only be subject to a fine not to exceed one thousand dollars (\$1,000)."

Section 3. G.S. 75A-13.2 is repealed.

Section 4. This act becomes effective December 1, 1999, and applies to acts committed on or after that date.

In the General Assembly read three times and ratified this the 20th day of July, 1999.

s/ Dennis A. Wicker  
President of the Senate

s/ James B. Black  
Speaker of the House of Representatives

s/ James B. Hunt, Jr.  
Governor

Approved 10:17 p.m. this 10th day of August, 1999