

**Maryland Department of Health**  
**Center for Recreation and Community Environmental Health Services**  
**Youth Camps**

**Watercraft Safety Plan Guidance**

**Purpose**

The purpose of a written safety plan is to inform camp staff and volunteers what actions to follow to ensure each camper's safety while running watercraft programs. The Specialized Activity must be conducted according to the safety plan.

**Training**

Staff and volunteers must receive training on the watercraft safety plan. Training must include an opportunity to discuss the plan and ask questions.

**Knowledge and Conduct**

Staff and volunteers must know and follow the watercraft safety plan procedures.

- Each staff member / volunteer must receive training on the watercraft safety plan and be allowed to ask questions regarding the plan.
- The camp must keep documentation that each staff member / volunteer received the training not more than 30 days before the activity.

**Availability**

The watercraft safety plan must be on file in the camp headquarters or office and a copy must be available to the camp staff / volunteers.

- Each staff member / volunteer must know where the watercraft safety plan is kept and / or be provided with their own copy of the plan.

**Writing a Watercraft Safety Plan and Procedures**

Provide the following descriptions and actions in your watercraft safety plan:

1. Describe the type of watercraft used in each watercraft activity, the number and age of the occupants, and the types of U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation devices used.
  - a. State that all occupants of a watercraft must wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device.
  - b. State that all water skiers must wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device.
2. Describe the health and safety risks of the activity and how these risks are addressed.
3. Describe all safety rules, standards, and practices for the watercraft activity.
4. Describe the equipment to be used, your safety procedures, and proper use of this equipment.

5. Describe your maintenance procedure and proper storage for the watercraft activity equipment to ensure it remains in good working condition.
6. Describe the required staff; staff qualifications; and each staff member's responsibility before, during, and after the watercraft activity. Minimum state requirements for staffing are below. The camp's requirements may be stricter.
  - a. Director (an individual who is 21 years old or older and has at least 24 weeks of supervisory experience) present at camp or at the activity site, when the activity is not at the camp.
  - b. A swimming instructor must be present.
  - c. An adult with CPR certification from a national organization on each watercraft.
  - d. An adult with first aid certification from a national organization on each watercraft.
  - e. Lifeguard or water rescue certification appropriate for the watercraft activity is 1 lifeguard or equivalent person for each watercraft activity.
  - f. Staff to camper ratio is 1 staff to 10 campers.
7. Provide a diagram showing each staff member's position. Minimum state requirements for staffing are below. The camp's requirements may be stricter.
  - a. If activity is not on camp premises, a camp director must be present.
  - b. If the activity is a river trip, the instructor must be part of the trip. If the activity is not a river trip, the instructor must be within sight and hearing of the watercraft activity.
  - c. If the watercraft is towing a water skier, a staff member must be on board the watercraft, in addition to the driver.
8. Describe the following when the watercraft activity is not on camp premises:
  - a. How the campers are transported to the activity.
  - b. Where and how the health and emergency information for campers, staff members, and volunteers will be kept.
  - c. How the group participating in the watercraft activity communicates to emergency services (911), parents, and main camp office in an emergency.
  - d. Who will be the contact person and what their phone number is.
9. Describe the procedure (who/how) for taking attendance before, during, and after the watercraft activity.
10. Describe how attendance of all campers is taken quickly during a watercraft activity in an emergency.
11. Describe how parents, staff, and campers are notified of the activity, prior to the watercraft activity.
12. Describe how the camp obtains written authorization from the child's parent for the camper to participate in the watercraft activity.

13. Describe the minimum requirements for campers to participate (i.e., age, skills, etc.).
14. Describe how the campers' swimming abilities are evaluated before participation in the watercraft activity.
  - a. Describe the watercraft test. This is different from the facility's swim test to use the deep end of the pool; you must have a test for all participants. Keep a list of campers and their swimming ability. Do not rely on the facility to keep track of this information.
15. Describe how the campers are assigned to appropriate areas, equipment, and activities once the swim test is completed.
16. Describe how campers are instructed in safety procedures and the use of any protective equipment.
17. Describe the training provided to individuals using a watercraft related to boarding, debarking, and safety procedures while on the watercraft.
18. Describe how, where, and when (not more than 30 days before the activity) staff members / volunteers will be trained on this watercraft safety plan.
19. Describe how the camp will document that each staff / volunteer has received and understand the watercraft safety plan training prior to camp and where that documentation will be kept.
20. Describe how the staff / volunteers will have access to the watercraft safety plan; where copies of the plan will be kept and / or copies provided to the staff / volunteers.