



California Boater Card FAQ

Q: What is a California Boater Card?

A: The California Boater Card will show that its holder has successfully taken and passed a NASBLA/state-approved boater safety education examination. Beginning Jan. 1, 2018, California is phasing in by age the requirement that residents who operate a motorized vessel on state waterways will be required to carry the California Boater Card. The card will be issued by the California State Parks Division of Boating and Waterways (DBW).

Q: Where did the idea of a California Boater Card come from?

A: Legislative bills requiring some form of boating education in the state have been authored over the years. On Sept. 18, 2014, Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr. signed into law Senate Bill 941, which prohibits the operation of motorized vessels in California without a valid Boater Card developed and issued by DBW.

Q: What are the benefits of taking a boater safety course?

A: Not only is mandatory education the law, the California Boater Card Program promotes boating safety on our waterways. U. S. Coast Guard accident data show that states with some form of boating safety education have fewer accidents and fatalities than states without any boater education requirements. In 2015, 724 California recreational vessels were involved in reported accidents and 49 boaters died. More than 232 boaters were injured in severity beyond first aid treatment. Only one of the boat operators involved in fatal accidents had taken an approved boating safety course. Increased numbers of boaters taking approved safety courses will benefit all California recreational boaters.

Q: When can I apply for my California Boater Card and what will it cost?

A: DBW plans to begin issuing the California Boater Cards prior to Jan. 1, 2018, implementation date. The Boater Card Technical Advisory Group anticipates that the cost of the card will be no more than \$10. The lost card replacement fee will be no more than \$5.



Q: When will operators be required to have a Boater Card?

A: The new requirement will begin on Jan. 1, 2018 for all persons 20 years of age and younger who operate a motorized vessel on state waterways. On that date these boaters will be required to carry a boater card issued by DBW, unless they meet certain exemptions stated below.*

Each year after January 2018, a new age group will be added to those who are required to possess a valid card. By 2025, all persons who operate a motorized vessel on California waters will be required to have one. Once issued, the card remains valid for a boat operator's lifetime. California Harbors and Navigation Code Section 678.11(b) contains the following phase-in schedule based on operator age:

- January 1, 2018 Persons 20 years of age or younger
- January 1, 2019 Persons 25 years of age or younger
- January 1, 2020 Persons 35 years of age or younger
- January 1, 2021 Persons 40 years of age or younger
- January 1, 2022 Persons 45 years of age or younger
- January 1, 2023 Persons 50 years of age or younger
- January 1, 2024 Persons 60 years of age or younger
- January 1, 2025 All persons regardless of age

*California age restrictions for operating a motorized vessel: According to California Harbors and Navigation Code Section 658.5, NO person under 16 years of age may operate a boat with a motor of more than 15 horsepower, except for a sailboat that does not exceed 30 feet in length or a dinghy used directly between a moored boat and the shore (or between two moored boats). The law allows children 12-15 years of age to operate boats with a motor of more than 15 horsepower or sailboats over 30 feet if supervised on board by an adult at least 18 years of age. Violating these provisions constitutes an infraction.

Q: What courses will be approved to offer Boater Card exams, and how will I find them?

A: Boating safety course providers must be NASBLA approved and be state-approved by DBW. Courses may be classroom, home study or online. The current list of approved courses can be found online at www.CaliforniaBoaterCard.com.

Q: How much time will it take to complete an approved boating safety course including the exam?

A: Approved online courses run a minimum of three hours to complete. Classroom and home study courses vary in length, with most classes no more than eight hours.



Q: Am I pre-qualified for a Boater Card if I have already taken a boater education course or will take one before 2018?

A: DBW has determined that it will accept proof of passing a National Association of State Boating Law Administration (NASBLA) and California Division of Boating and Waterways approved-boater education course taken between Jan. 1, 2015 and Dec. 31, 2017. Persons who have passed an approved examination during this timeframe will have 1 year from the effective January 1, 2018 implementation date to apply for their California Boater Card to receive the “grandfathering” exemption regardless of their age. Older courses may not include recent state or national changes to navigation law.

Q: Who will be exempt from needing a Boater Card?

A: According to California law the following persons will not be required to have a boater card to operate a motorized vessel on California waterways when the requirements go into effect beginning in January 2018:

- A person operating a rental vessel.
- A person operating a vessel while under the direct supervision of a person 18 years of age or older who is in possession of a California Boater Card.
- A person who is a resident of a state other than California who is temporarily operating a vessel in California for less than 60 days and meets the boating requirements, if any, of his/her state.
- A person who is a resident of a country other than the United States who is temporarily operating a vessel in California for less than 90 days and meets the boating requirements, if any, of his/her country.
- A person operating a vessel in an organized regatta or vessel race, or water ski race.
- A person who is in possession of a current commercial fishing license.
- A person who is in possession of a valid marine operator license, for the waters upon which the licensee is operating, issued by the US Coast Guard, or who is in possession of a valid certificate issued pursuant to the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, 1978, as amended.
- A person who has successfully completed a boating course approved by the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training.

Q: Why aren't people who rent motorboats in California required to have a Boater Card?

A: California State Parks Division of Boating and Waterways (DBW) is implementing the California Vessel Operator Card law as it is written. Many rental facilities provide basic boater safety information to operators. DBW encourages all boat operators to take an approved boating safety course and apply for a California Boater Card.



The requirement for California boaters to obtain this card happened through the state legislative process. The bill that created the California Boater Card, SB 941 (Chapter 433, Statutes of 2014), went through a number of changes as it moved through the California Legislature.

For example, earlier versions of the bill did include a requirement for a boater card for rentals. However, in June 2014, when the bill was heard in the Assembly Transportation Committee, the Committee analysis recommended removing the card requirement for rentals, and noted the following points:

- According to 2013 California Recreational Boating Accident Statistics, of all the vessel accidents that occurred in the state that year, only 9% involved rental vessels.
- The boating industry indicated that rental agents generally provide boater safety training as part of the rental process.
- The California Yacht Brokers Association, the Marina Recreation Association, the National Marine Manufacturers Association, and the Western Boater's Safety Group, supported the bill stating, "The bill strikes a good balance between ensuring that vessel operators are sufficiently educated on boating safety and vessel operation without imposing an excessive burden that would serve as a barrier to operating a vessel."

The author accepted this recommended amendment, and on June 18, 2014 the next version of the bill provided an exemption for individuals renting vessels.

Q: Is there a fine for violating the requirement to carry a California Boater Card?

A: Yes. A violation of this article (Harbors and Navigation Code Section 678.15) is an infraction. According to the person convicted of an infraction for a violation of this article shall be fined as follows:

- For an initial conviction, by a fine of not more than \$100.
- For a second conviction, by a fine of not more than \$250.
- For a third or subsequent conviction, by a fine of not more \$500.
- A fine imposed on a vessel operator pursuant to subdivision (b) shall be waived, if the vessel operator provides proof that he or she had a valid vessel operator card at the time of the citation.
- In addition to the fines imposed by subdivision (b), the court shall order a person convicted of violating this article to complete and pass a boating safety course approved by the division pursuant to Section 668.3.



- If a person who is ordered to complete and pass a boating safety course pursuant to paragraph (1) is 18 years of age or younger, the court may require that person to obtain the consent of a parent or guardian to enroll in that course.
- A person who has been ordered by a court to complete a boating safety course pursuant to paragraph (1) shall submit to the court proof of completion and passage of the course within seven months of the date of his or her conviction. The proof shall be in a form that has been approved by the division and that is capable of being submitted to the court or a state or local agency approved by the division through the US Postal Service or another certified means of transmission.

Q: How did DBW determine the cost of the California Boater Card?

A: Senate Bill 941 required DBW to establish and consult with a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) in determining the amount of fees imposed by the reasonable costs of the development, establishment and operation of the mandatory boating safety education program.

Q: Who are the members of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG)?

A: The Technical Advisory Group members include interested persons from boating organizations, marine law enforcement and boating safety educators. Members were appointed by the California State Parks Director.

1. David Dickerson, National Marine Manufacturers Association
2. Doug Powell, California State Sheriffs Association
3. Glen Brandenburg, Mission Bay Aquatic Center
4. Greg Gibeson, Recreational Boaters of California
5. James Goff, Homeland Security United States Coast Guard Auxiliary
6. James Gordon, California's Boating Safety Officer's Association
7. Kevin Ketchum, Marine Recreation Association
8. Steve Powell, Los Angeles Lifeguards
9. Tom Trainor, California Yacht Broker's Association

For California Boater Card inquiries, please visit www.CaliforniaBoaterCard.com, email us at BoaterCard@parks.ca.gov or call 1-888-326-2822.

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