

Safe Use of Small Boats in Shipyard Employment

Small boats (motorboats), such as rigid-hulled inflatable vessels, are used in shipyard employment to reach work areas that would otherwise be inaccessible. These vessels are also used during diving or other activities associated with the repair, maintenance, and construction of maritime vessels. Using small boats can expose workers to serious hazards. Employers need to be aware of these potential hazards so they can take steps to address and prevent them.

The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) primarily regulates these vessels. However, during boarding, disembarking, or working from small boats, OSHA requires that, to protect workers from drowning, employers provide and ensure workers wear a USCG-approved personal flotation device (PFD) (29 CFR [1915.77\(e\)](#) and [1915.158\(a\)](#)). Boats should also be examined regularly before use to ensure overall seaworthiness and proper functioning of equipment, as well as compliance with applicable federal and state equipment requirements.

In accord with USCG safety requirements for uninspected vessels, employers operating small boats must also:

- Equip boats with fire extinguishing equipment when required ([46 CFR 25.30](#)). Boats should also have other emergency equipment deemed necessary on board, such as distress signals, radio communication, and first aid supplies.
- Provide USCG-approved wearable personal flotation devices (PFDs) for each employee and a throwable flotation device on board ([46 CFR 25.25-5](#)).

It is important to ensure operators have received the appropriate training, such as the [USCG Auxiliary Boating Skills and Seamanship](#) or [Boat America Safety Course](#), and are qualified to safely operate the boat. Training topics typically covered for the safe operation of small boats include:

- Boating equipment and troubleshooting
- Abiding by manufacturer weight limits and number of passengers on board
- Boat handling
- Signage and navigation aids



Photo: iStock

Example of a rigid-hulled inflatable vessel.

- Rules of boating traffic
- Weather and water considerations
- Use of radio communication
- Dangers of drugs or alcohol for safe boat operation
- Rescue procedures
- First aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), and automated external defibrillator (AED) training

Depending on the types of activities taking place, more advanced training may be appropriate. The sample [Activity Hazard Analysis](#), developed by the Army Corps of Engineers, is a tool that can be used to determine the necessary training, proficiencies, and risks associated with tasks performed using small boats. Also, each state has a minimum equipment list depending on boat size, which could include equipment such as sound signaling devices (horn, whistle, bell) and other safety appliances.

Workers' Rights

Under the OSH Act workers have the right to:

- Working conditions that do not pose a risk of serious harm or violate OSHA standards.
- Receive information and training (in a language and vocabulary the worker understands) about workplace hazards, methods to prevent them, and the OSHA standards that apply to their workplace.
- Review records of work-related injuries and illnesses.
- File a complaint asking OSHA to inspect their workplace if they believe there is a serious hazard or that their employer is not following OSHA's rules. OSHA will keep all identities confidential.

- Exercise their rights under the law without retaliation, including reporting an injury or raising health and safety concerns with their employer or OSHA. If a worker has been retaliated against for using their rights, they must file a complaint with OSHA as soon as possible, but no later than 30 days after learning of the adverse action.

For additional information, see OSHA's Workers page (www.osha.gov/workers).

How to Contact OSHA

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, employers are responsible for providing safe and healthful workplaces for their employees. OSHA's role is to help ensure these conditions for America's workers by setting and enforcing standards, and providing training, education and assistance. For more information, visit www.osha.gov or call OSHA at 1-800-321-OSHA (6742), TTY 1-877-889-5627.



This is one in a series of informational fact sheets highlighting OSHA programs, policies or standards. It does not impose any new compliance requirements. For a comprehensive list of compliance requirements of OSHA standards or regulations, refer to Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations. This information will be made available to sensory-impaired individuals upon request. The voice phone is (202) 693-1999; teletypewriter (TTY) number: 1-877-889-5627.



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