

# HF949/SF553: EXPANDING MINNESOTA'S BOATER EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Minnesota Legislature is considering HF949/SF553 this session which, if passed into law, will expand Minnesota's existing boater education program. HF949/SF553 is widely supported across the state, from boat dealers, lake associations, law enforcement, chambers of commerce, resorts, and more.

## What Will HF949/SF553 Accomplish?



Expand Minnesota's existing youth (12-17) boater education course requirement to include all operators ages 12+ born on or after July 1, 1987.



Require boat rentals to provide customers a summary of Minnesota boating regulations and complete a short exam online before operating a boat.

## Key Facts about Minnesota's Growing Boating Community

- Recreational boating and fishing contributed \$775 million to the state's economy in 2021.
- Minnesota ranks second in the U.S. for registered watercraft and first per capita.
- In the last few years, Minnesota has seen registration of 16,000 new motorized watercraft.
- Minnesota is one of a handful of states that does not require boater education beyond youth.
- 2021 had 18 boating fatalities on Minnesota waters, among the most on record since 2005.
- U.S. Coast Guard statistics confirm 75% of boating deaths occurred on boats where the operator had no safety instruction. That number drops to 12% when the operator received a nationally approved boating safety education certificate.
- In the 1990's, the average for nonfatal boating accidents was 148. After implementing youth boater education requirements, the average for nonfatal boating accidents between 2010-2019 was 71.

## How Does HF949/SF553 Compare To Other Minnesota Recreation Product Education And Safety Trainings?

- Minnesota's recreation products - including firearms, ATVs, and snowmobiles - require robust education and safety training beyond youth, with boats being the exception.
- Safety coursework is accessible to all Minnesotans through convenient online access, at the cost of \$24.95, or via paper form, which is free of charge, and provided on request by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

## As A Minnesota Boater, How Do I Comply To The Expanded Education Course?



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## Frequently Asked Questions



**If someone is born after 07/01/1987 but took the test as a youth (12-17) for the youth operator's permit, would they need to retake the course?** No, they would not need to retake the course. The permit they received previously would be valid for operation.



**Will this create a new user fee?** No, currently the boater education safety course (required for youth 12-17) is available for free via paper version from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) or can be completed online for \$24.95, like other recreation products.



**Is the course only online or will there be other options?** The Minnesota boater safety education course is available online or through free paper packets that may be requested through the Minnesota DNR. The online course is administered by a third party vendor which hosts all education courses for Minnesota recreation products.



**Will stakeholders (boat dealers, marinas, resorts, lake associations, etc.) have input on the content or implementation of the course expansion?** Yes, the DNR will work with stakeholders on content and implementation practices. There is widespread recognition that various businesses in different locations have various needs which may be accommodated.



**Is there standard safety included in the education course?** Yes, the course is required to be approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA). All states have boater education programs certified by NASBLA, the leading organization that works to develop public policy for recreational boating safety. NASBLA is comprised of recreational boating authorities of all 50 states and U.S. territories.



**Will there be Minnesota specific information in the course?** Yes, this is a key opportunity for stakeholders to help the DNR focus targeted messages to all Minnesota boaters. It is important for Minnesota messaging on aquatic invasive species (AIS), user conflict reduction, lake ecology, towed water sports and the impacts of wakes to be included in the course.



**How will this impact a business that rents boats?** Under HF949/SF553, all rental companies – for watercraft or personal watercraft – must provide a summary of the statutes, regulations and instructions for safe operation to the renter. In addition, the renter must take a short boater safety exam in a form approved by the commissioner in order to leave the premises.

## Partners



OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF



HENNEPIN COUNTY, MN

February 28, 2023

Representative Erin Koegel  
445 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: Support for HF 949 Boater Education Safety

Dear Representative Koegel:

Thank you for your leadership as chief author of legislation to expand the recreational boating safety education program in Minnesota.

We have the responsibility to patrol Hennepin County's 104 lakes and 3 rivers, which offer countless recreational opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic brought many people to enjoy Minnesota's great outdoors in a variety of ways, including through boating and water sports. In fact, Minnesota ranks second in the nation for registered boats with more than 825,000 registered boats, which equates to nearly one boat for every six people.

Most states require some form of boater education, and while Minnesota requires an operator safety education course for every other motorized recreational product, it does not require such a course for boating. I support your bill that would require mandatory boater safety education for operators and I urge its passage this legislative session.

The educational components that an expanded boater safety education program would support will make all of Minnesota's lake and waterways a much safer place, with less injury and accidents, for everyone to enjoy.

Thank you for your leadership to improve boater safety and let me know how the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office can lend its support to your work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dawanna Witt', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sheriff Dawanna Witt