

Summer in Minnesota is a busy time. After surviving another long winter, we instinctively and collectively yearn to get outside and enjoy the warm weather. Summer brings many activities unique to the season. For some, summer means outdoor concerts or farmers' markets. For others summer means time for golf, softball, or other sports. For many, summer means time on the water or hitting the road on two wheels. Today, we are going to discuss important law changes coming for boats and bikes.

Over the next 4 years, more and more adults will be required to obtain a watercraft operator's permit from the DNR before hitting the water at the helm of a boat. On July 1st, 2025, all people born on or after July 1st, 2004 will be required to have a watercraft operator's permit. On July 1st, 2026 the requirement for a watercraft operator's permit extends to all people born on or after July 1st, 2000. On July 1st, 2027, the requirement extends again to require all people born on or after July 1st, 1996 to obtain a watercraft operator's permit. Finally, on July 1st, 2028, the law will require all people born on or after July 1st, 1987 to obtain a watercraft operator's permit before operating a boat. If you are 38 years old or younger in 2025, you will eventually need to have a watercraft operator's permit to pilot a boat in Minnesota. Those over 38 years of age in 2025 will not be affected by this new law. Even so, learning more about boating safety is never a bad idea at any age!

There are some exceptions to this requirement. No watercraft operator's permit is required to operate a watercraft, that is not a personal watercraft, powered by a motor of 25 horsepower or less. The law permits the operation of a watercraft without the proper permit in "an emergency." Also exempted from the permit requirement are operators from another state or Canada who meet the operator requirements of their home state and country or watercraft operators working under a dealer's license.

Changes are also coming for young watercraft operators. Beginning July 1st, 2025, anyone under the age of 12 is prohibited from operating a motorboat with more than 75 horsepower under any circumstances. Operators under age 12 may pilot a watercraft, that is not a personal watercraft, that is powered by a motor of 75 horsepower or less if accompanied by a person aged 21 or older who has an operator's permit (if required) and is within immediate reach of the controls. Youth under age 12 may operate a watercraft, powered by a motor of 25 horsepower or less, without a permit or the need to be accompanied by an adult.

Operators aged 12 to 17 piloting a watercraft of greater than 25 horsepower must have an operator's permit and be accompanied by a person aged 21 or older who is within immediate reach of the controls. Operators aged 12 to 17 may operate a watercraft, that is not a personal watercraft, powered by a motor of 25 horsepower or less, without a permit or the need to be accompanied by an adult.

The Minnesota DNR has a wealth of resources on water safety. This includes access to the watercraft operator's permit course and the boater's guide. Both may be found online at: <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/safety/boatwater/education.html>.

Let's step away from the water now and talk about motorcycles. Have you ever been stuck in traffic and thought about how you could get to your destination faster by walking or biking past all the stopped cars? A law change coming on July 1st, 2025 will allow motorcyclists to bypass slow traffic. Under this new law, motorcyclists may drive next to and pass a vehicle in the same lane or drive between two parallel lanes of traffic heading in the same direction. Motorcyclists choosing to do so may go no faster

than 40 MPH and no more than 15 MPH above the speed of the traffic. The law also provides for a petty misdemeanor penalty for the operator of a motor vehicle who intentionally impedes or attempts to stop a motorcyclist from operating as described above.

When you find yourself stuck in traffic congestion, please remember that there could be a motorcyclist legally passing you. If you need to change lanes or exit, make sure you are watching for these passing motorcycles.

One last note on motorcycles. Every year we receive complaints about dirt bikes, or Off-Highway Motorcycles (OHM). Unlike snowmobiles or ATVs, OHMs are not permitted in the road ditches or road right-of-way. OHMs licensed as motorcycles may operate on the public roads. However, OHMs not licensed as motorcycles must be operated on private property, on designated OHV trails, or on other public land where motor vehicles are allowed. Please ensure OHMs are kept out of the road ditches.

Change is rarely easy. Prepare for these changes and you'll have a smoother ride into the future. For more crime prevention information and safety information visit the Benton County Sheriff's Office website at: <https://www.co.benton.mn.us/211/Crime-Prevention>. You can also like and follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @BentonMNSheriff for regular updates and crime prevention messages.