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CG-BSX-23 Policy Letter 23-06

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COMDT (CG-BSX-23)

To: Distribution

Subj: Definition of Canoes and Kayaks

Ref: (a) Title 46 U.S. Code Chapter 43
(b) Title 33 Code of Federal Regulations Subchapter S

1. Purpose. This policy establishes regulatory compliance guidance for the classification of vessels as canoes or kayaks.
2. Directives Affected. None.
3. Action. USCG Headquarters Units and Offices, Districts and Sector Commanders and recreational boat manufacturers may use this policy letter to ensure compliance with U.S. statutory and regulatory requirements.
4. Background.
 - a. The USCG has statutory authority under reference (a), Section 4302(a) to prescribe regulations establishing minimum safety standards for recreational vessels and associated equipment.
 - b. At the present time there is no Coast Guard definition of a canoe or kayak, specifically as used in various subparts of 33 CFR 183.
5. Discussion. This policy letter is applicable to recreational vessels seeking to be classified as a canoe or kayak. In the absence of a Coast Guard definition, the definition from the American Boat and Yacht Council (ABYC) standard *H-29 Canoes and Kayaks* will be used throughout 33 CFR 183.
6. Canoe. The following definition may be used as an acceptable method for complying with the applicable referenced regulations.
 - a. Canoe – a watercraft, designed to be manually propelled, with or without provision for auxiliary power, with neither end having a transverse dimension greater than 45% of its maximum beam and that conforms to the following specifications:

CANOE LENGTH (feet)	MAXIMUM BEAM Canoe length
≤ 14	1/3
> 14 to ≤ 16	1/4
>16	1/5

- b. If provisions are provided by the manufacturer for the addition of auxiliary power:
 - i. The manufacturer's rated horsepower should not be greater than three (3) horsepower as recommended by the same ABYC standard.
- 7. Kayak. The following definition may be used as an acceptable method for complying with the applicable referenced regulations.
 - a. Kayak – a watercraft designed to be manually propelled, typically without provision for auxiliary power, with the occupant intended to be seated with legs approximately 90° from the torso.
 - b. If provisions are provided by the manufacturer for the addition of auxiliary power:
 - i. The manufacturer's rated horsepower should not be greater than three (3) horsepower as recommended by the same ABYC standard.
- 8. Additional Considerations. If the manufacturer provides or advertises use of the vessel with greater than three (3) horsepower the Coast Guard will consider the vessel to be a mono-hulled boat with greater than two (2) horsepower. As such the vessel would need to comply with all regulations applicable to mono-hulled outboard powered boats. Applicable voluntary consensus standards should be referenced to ensure relevant, current safety practices are in place during the design and manufacture of recreational vessels.
- 9. Disclaimer. The guidance in this policy letter is not a substitute for applicable legal requirements and is not a rule. It is not intended to impose legally binding requirements on any party. This guidance represents the USCG's current rationale on this topic and may assist industry, mariners, the public, and the Coast Guard, as well as other Federal and state regulators, in applying statutory and regulatory requirements. An alternative approach for complying with these requirements is acceptable if that approach satisfies the requirements of the applicable statutes and regulations.
- 10. Changes. This policy will be revised as necessary. It will be available with any changes on the CG-BSX-23 website at <https://safeafloat.com/policies-letters/>. Questions concerning compliance with recreational boat manufacturing requirements should be directed to Commandant (CG-BSX-23), Recreational Boat Product Assurance Branch, Office of Auxiliary & Boating Safety at rbscompliance@uscg.mil.

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