

Operating Guideline # 205

Water Craft

Created January 21, 2020

Reviewed June 16, 2022



PURPOSE:

The Purpose of this Operating Guideline (OG) is to protect firefighters during response to water property access emergencies requiring marine vessels.

GUIDELINE:

1. Any time watercraft is used to respond to an emergency the following will be complied with:

- a. Turnout gear of any kind will **not** be worn in or on the watercraft;
- b. Watercraft will not be overloaded;
- c. Personal Flotation Devices (PFD's) will be worn by all personnel on board, including agencies assisting (POLICE/FIRE/EMS). PFD's must be Transport Canada Approved;
- d. Fire personnel shall not operate a watercraft unless they are in possession of a valid Transport Canada Pleasure Craft Operator Card (PCOC) Certificate as proof of competency.
- e. Fire personnel are **NEVER** to be alone on a vessel. There is no exception to this rule.
- g. Fire personnel that are operating as crew on any fire department owned vessel must have a valid Small Domestic Vessel – Basic Safety (SDV-BS) Certificate
- h. Fire personnel with a Small Vessel Operators Proficiency (SVOP) Certificate should be considered the master of any vessel where the balance of the firefighters have only their SDV-BS.
- i. All Certificates must be saved in the personnel folder at the Township of Muskoka Lakes in order to be considered valid for the purposes of this guideline.

2. All fire department personnel operating a vessel for fire suppression or transportation of personnel shall adhere to the Small Vessels Regulations, *under Canada Shipping Act*. Below are some common regulations that we will always promote.

- a. If two power-driven vessels meet head-on, both must give way by altering their course to starboard.
- b. A power-driven vessel approaching another power-driven vessel on its own starboard side must give way and avoid crossing ahead of the other vessel.
- c. A vessel is overtaking another when it is coming up with another vessel, from a direction more than 22.5 degrees abaft its beam. The overtaking vessel must keep clear of the stand-on vessel. The stand-on vessel must maintain its course and speed until the overtaking vessel is finally past and clear.
- d. *If you cannot see other vessels because of fog or bad weather reduce speed, sound your fog signal, proceed with extreme caution and be prepared to stop.*
- e. If you detect a vessel abeam avoid turning *toward* the vessel if at all possible.
- f. Do not block the passage of any vessel navigating in narrow channels or designated traffic lanes.

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g. Navigation lights and signals tell other vessels not only where you are. Using these lights and signals properly is an important part of safe navigation.

3. Personnel are expected to know their own swimming ability and limitations. Personnel must take appropriate measures to ensure their own safety, as well as the safety of any potential victims.

Thermal Protection

4. Muskoka Lakes surface water temperatures usually range into the minus degrees Celsius from November to April. Fire personnel will not enter the water to perform rescue functions in this time period unless they have an adequate level of thermal protection for the existing water temperature and a rescue plan. Hypothermia protection and treatment should also be considered early for all rescue victims.

5. Fire personnel may operate from fire department or another agency's watercraft (as available and appropriate). They should avoid operating from civilian watercraft, if possible, and should never operate from any watercraft in which the operator is impaired, unfamiliar with the craft, or when safety is in question.

6. Personnel must maintain high situational awareness at all times. Wind shifts, wakes & waves, and evasive steering movements may cause the watercraft to shift suddenly throwing riders and causing injury.

7. Personnel may also be thrown overboard, without warning. Good shoes, sure footing, good balance, and an adequate hand hold should be maintained whenever possible.

8. All deck areas and surfaces of should be kept clear and clean. Excess water should be cleared when possible.

9. Adequate deck lighting should be used at night, when it does not interfere with operations.

11. The watercraft operator, also known as Master or Captain, is in charge of a vessel, its crew members, and passengers and/or cargo while the vessel is at sea or in port. The Master controls and manages all aspects of the vessel's operation and his/her responsibilities include ensuring:

- a) the safe operation of the vessel at all times
- b) the vessel complies with local and international law
- c) the safety of all personnel on board
- d) the safe carriage of cargo or tow, and
- e) preparing voyage plans and recording all the vessel's activities

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12. The ranking Fire Department Officer is ultimately in charge of the emergency operation but not the vessel. The Officer should limit the number of personnel on the craft to the minimum necessary to safely manage the incident. The operator or fire department member in charge must ensure that all rescue or fire fighting operations are conducted in a safe manner.

13. If it becomes necessary to enter the water to perform a rescue, an operator will remain on-board the watercraft at all times. Watercraft will never be abandoned during emergency operations unless at anchor or dock lines properly secure it. The remaining personnel will perform watercraft positioning, scene safety & protection, radio, and rescue support functions. Radio contact with command and/or land units will be maintained whenever possible.

14. When responding to EMS or rescue incidents, fire personnel will ensure that appropriate EMS equipment is loaded on to the craft prior to departing the dock. This equipment will ensure that proper treatment can be initiated if indicated on a patient or victim while in the boat prior to transferring the patient to shore units.

15. Fire department personnel operating from watercraft should enter the water (such as to perform a rescue) only as a last resort. Crews should consider less dangerous intervention methods first, such as reach, throw, and then go. Entry into the water should only be considered if it could be accomplished safely and effectively.

16. If water entry is deemed the best possible option, personnel are expected to utilize an appropriate level of personal protection that will ensure their safety. If adequate PPE is unavailable, alternative (non-entry) methods should be employed.

17. Fire department personnel will not enter the water unless trained and equipped to perform the expected tasks. Adequate backup personnel (2) should be readily available whenever possible. Only the minimum number of personnel needed to perform the expected tasks should be used, and exposure time in the water should be minimized as much as possible.

18. A Pointer shall be assigned from the first arriving company on scene whose SOLE RESPONSIBILITY is to watch and monitor status of victim(s) in the water. The Pointer shall maintain constant eye contact with the victim until:

- a) The victim is rescued,
- b) The individual is relieved or
- c) The victim goes subsurface.

The pointer shall note the victim's last position and relay information concerning the victim.

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19. When responding to reported boat fire, crew members will load the proper amount of foam on the boat, prior to leaving the dock. Firefighters will not board a burning vessel unless properly trained and equipped to do so. The only time necessary to board a burning vessel is if there is an imminent rescue situation.

20. Approach to the burning vessel should ALWAYS be made from UPWIND if possible. Doing so will keep the smoke and heat away from the fire and crew, and provide for better visibility.

21. The boat operator should advise “on-looking” boats to clear the area on all sides of the burning vessel in an effort to contain the fire to only one vessel.

22. Boat fires will be managed in the defensive strategy UNLESS there is an imminent rescue situation, the fire is in the incipient stage, or the fire is already controlled and the structural integrity of the boat is intact.

23. After every use, the boat will be properly secured, locked, covered, and cleaned at the dock. Any service needed or problems encountered should be documented via email and sent to the District Chief, Deputy Chief and Fire Chief.

RESPONSIBILITY:

It is the responsibility of all Emergency Operations Division staff to comply with the provisions of this Operating Guideline.

REFERENCES:

- Section 21 Guidance Note GN-6-2 , Firefighting Near Water