

NAO 209-125

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NOAA SMALL BOAT SAFETY PROGRAM

SECTION 1. PURPOSE.

.01 The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has a responsibility to provide a safe working environment for its workforce and for partners who are exposed to the risks associated with using small boats owned and/or operated by NOAA. This is consistent with NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) 209-1, NOAA Safety Policy. The purpose of this Order is:

- a. to make small boat safety the number one priority for all small boating operations;
- b. to ensure small boats meet NOAA's seaworthiness and operational safety standards;
- c. to establish a comprehensive NOAA Small Boat Standards and Procedures Manual (hereafter, "the Manual");
- d. to establish a NOAA Small Boat Safety Board (SBSB);
- e. to establish a Small Boat Program (SBP);
- f. to foster and facilitate collaboration within NOAA and with outside partners having a common interest in safe, efficient, and environmentally sound small boat operations; and
- g. to encourage a corporate culture that values the skilled small boat operator, encourages the distribution of information, seeks a quality approach, shares commitment, and seeks to manage operational risk.

.02 This is a complete revision and update to NAO 217-103, Management of NOAA Small Boats. Significant changes in this Order include: re-titling and renumbering of the Order to place it in the NAO Series' chapter on safety; revising and updating the policies for small boat safety; and introducing and authorizing issuance of the NOAA Small Boat Standards and Procedures Manual and prescribing that its contents will expand upon safety issues covered in this Order and will cover the non-safety matters previously addressed in NAO 217-103.

SECTION 2. SCOPE.

This Order applies:

- a. to all NOAA small boats as defined in Section 6.01 of this Order;
- b. to all NOAA personnel who operate any small boat in the performance of their official duties;
and
- c. to all individuals who operate NOAA small boats.

SECTION 3. POLICY.

.01 The NOAA Small Boat Standards and Procedures Manual (the Manual) will consist of a broad programmatic core manual having NOAA-wide application and by Supplemental Small Boat Policy (SSBP) and Small Boat Operating Manuals (SBOMs) developed by NOAA Programs (defined herein) to address their peculiar program and/or mission requirements.

- a. Issuance of the Manual is in compliance with NAO 200-3, The NOAA Administrative Order Series.
- b. The Manual augments and supplements the policies, procedures, and guidelines in this Order and is intended to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of NOAA's SBP by providing for the timely development and issuance of programmatic materials to the small boat community.
- c. The core elements of the Manual apply to all individuals and Programs involved with NOAA's small boats and has the same force, effect, and authority as this Order. These core elements shall be developed and maintained by the SBSB. An electronic edition of these elements will be available for viewing at the link to the Small Boat Program found on the Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO) webpage at <http://www.oma.noaa.gov/>.
- d. The Supplemental Small Boat Policy (SSBP) and Small Boat Operating Manuals (SBOMs) also have the same force, effect, and authority as the core Manual; however, they are developed by NOAA Programs and are applicable only to their specified Program and/or mission.

.02 At a minimum, all small boats and their required inventories shall be inspected annually and, additionally, in accordance with individual requirements developed under the Manual and/or by NOAA Programs under the SSBP and/or SBOM.

.03 All operators of NOAA small boats shall be trained and certified based on small boat size, engineering complexity, nature of operations, and operating area. NOAA-wide training requirements are defined in the core of the Manual; Program- and mission-related requirements are defined in the SSBP and/or the SBOM.

.04 NOAA small boats shall be operated in a safe and environmentally conscious manner.

.05 NOAA small boats shall be maintained in a seaworthy condition and be fit for the mission intended.

.06 Appropriate safety training and life saving equipment resources shall be provided to personnel operating or embarked on NOAA small boats.

.07 NOAA small boats shall be used only for official government purposes.

.08 Any incident or near-miss concerning a NOAA small boat must be reported in accordance with NAO 209-1, NOAA Safety Policy, and any additional requirements in the Manual.

.09 NOAA small boats shall conform to the visual identification and registration requirements provided in the Manual.

.10 A waiver is a written authorization that permits temporary deviation from provisions of this Order for strategic or compelling operational requirements. Any Request for Waiver to provisions of this Order shall be presented in writing to the SBSB. The SBSB will provide guidance to the Director, OMAO, who is the approval authority for all waivers to provisions of this Order. See the Manual for additional coverage of Requests for Waiver.

SECTION 4. BACKGROUND.

.01 Operating small boats in support of NOAA missions involves unique associated risks. NOAA relies on small boats to achieve mission requirements. There are numerous regulatory standards that address small boat safety, but little guidance or few regulations tailored specifically to the special mission of small boats or research vessels less than 300 gross tons. Current marine standards are derived from international conventions, lessons learned from casualties, and advances in technology. As such, the body of regulatory information continues to grow and change. Toward this end, this Order seeks to establish a NOAA Small Boat Program that is sufficiently fluid to meet varying small boat requirements on a national, regional, and local level.

.02 As steward of the Nation's oceans and atmosphere, it is NOAA's intent to comply with, or exceed, all applicable regulatory and industry standards and to foster a management culture committed to safe and environmentally sound small boat operations based upon the principles of risk management.

SECTION 5. RESPONSIBILITY.

.01 The Director, Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO), shall broadly administer NOAA's Small Boat Program and shall provide support and resources, and shall recommend additional funding sources for its operations. The Director, OMAO, is the final administrative authority for all matters pertaining to the NOAA Small-Boat Safety Program and its policies, procedures, and standards and shall review the contents of the Manual and any subsequent updates prior to their issuance. Concurrence will be indicated by signature of the Director on the sequentially numbered Transmittal Sheets that will accompany each issuance or update to the

Manual. The Director may request prior review and concurrence by the Deputy Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere prior to authorizing potentially controversial updates.

.02 The Small Boat Safety Board (SBSB).

a. The composition of the SBSB is as follows.

1. Board Members:

(a) Small Boat Program Manager (SBPM) - SBSB Coordinator;

(b) National Marine Fisheries Service representative(s);

(c) National Ocean Service representative(s);

(d) Oceanic and Atmospheric Research representative(s) (also representing National Weather Service);

(e) Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO) representative(s);

(f) NOAA Safety and Environmental Compliance Office (SECO) representative(s); and

(g) NOAA Law Enforcement (from various Line Offices) representative(s).

2. Each organization identified in Section 5.02a.1.(b) through (g) of this Order may designate one additional board member to the SBSB; however, for voting purposes, each of these organizations is entitled to cast a single vote (Oceanic and Atmospheric Research/National Weather Service also is entitled to one vote).

b. The SBSB serves in an advisory capacity to the Director, OMAO, and is the technical authority for matters pertaining to small boats. The SBSB shall:

1. develop, maintain, review, and approve this Order;

2. prepare, clear, issue, maintain, and distribute the NOAA Small Boat Standards and Procedures Manual (the Manual). The SBSB shall review and revise the Manual, as necessary, in order to keep it current with applicable policies and regulations and to maintain the ability to adapt to changes involving technology and/or safety within the marine community. The Manual, and its future updates, will be issued via sequentially numbered Transmittal Sheets;

3. develop, evaluate, and maintain a set of basic qualifications standards for small boat operators and crew;

4. approve basic small boat training requirements and approve all policies, standards, and operating procedures developed under the Manual (including all SSBP and SBOMs);

5. establish criteria and tools for small boat operational risk assessments;
6. identify and promote “best in class” safety practices for boat operations;
7. establish minimum criteria for SSBPs and SBOMs;
8. determine reciprocity or substitution of small boat operator and crew qualifications with similar qualifications of other agencies, organizations, or training programs;
9. serve as a policy and implementation advisor to the Small Boat Program;
10. evaluate data and trends gathered from operational, inspection, and incident reporting statistics and initiate appropriate actions;
11. address other boating-related matters as requested by NOAA management and/or as deemed appropriate by the SBSB;
12. inform NOAA management of significant small boat management issues;
13. maintain a compilation of small boat inventory and compliance records;
14. provide subject matter expertise for issues relating to the small boat community;
15. provide guidance to the Director, OMAO, regarding Requests for Waivers to the provisions of this Order and of the Manual;
16. respond to questions and concerns raised by the small boat community; and
17. review boating incident/accident reports and initiate appropriate actions.

.03 NOAA Programs. NOAA Programs that own, operate, and/or maintain small boats shall comply with this Order and the Manual and are responsible for the following:

- a. the safe operation, inspection compliance, life cycle management, and material condition of their small boats;
- b. developing and maintaining SSBP and SBOMs which are directly related to their unique program and mission requirements in order to augment the Manual;
- c. conducting and recording Operational Risk Assessments; and
- d. designating SBSB representatives and providing adequate time and resources for their participation on the SBSB.

SECTION 6. DEFINITIONS.

.01 NOAA Small Boat. A small boat, as defined in Section 6.06 of this Order, owned, operated, or maintained by NOAA. The term includes boats leased, loaned, bare boat chartered (also referred to as demise chartered), or operated under any cooperative agreement with other government agencies, universities, or scientific organizations by or from NOAA, but does not include boats time chartered by NOAA.

.02 NOAA Program. As used in this Order, the term refers to and is synonymous with NOAA Line Offices, Staff Offices, and any of their subordinate entities.

.03 NOAA Small Boat Standards and Procedures Manual. A compilation of instructions, procedures, regulations, and guidelines derived from operational risk assessments and best management practices applicable to NOAA Small Boats.

.04 Operational Risk Management. A process approach to understanding and dealing with the elements of risk associated with operations. Implementing Operational Risk Management involves performing risk assessments and implementing corresponding risk controls. Risk management is a decision making process that enhances operational capability. The process helps the decision maker in identifying hazards, assessing risks, and implementing controls to reduce the risk associated with any operation.

.05 Operational Risk Assessment. A process involving identification of risks associated with a NOAA small boat's operations and consideration of actions to reduce those risks. Supervision, communication, and overall support, operating area, operator experience level, personnel physical and mental fitness, weather, and complexity of mission may be factors in the assessment.

.06 Small Boat (or Vessel). As used in this Order, includes every description of watercraft less than 300 gross tons capable of being used as a means of transportation of persons on water. The SBSB will classify vessels by size, nature of operations, and engineering complexity.

.07 Small Boat Inspections. Documented, formal evaluations of a small boat's material condition, inventory, and compliance for which inspection criteria, frequency, and format are defined in the Manual.

.08 Small Boat Operating Manual (SBOM). A compilation of instructions, procedures, and guidelines specific to each small boat, its mission, and its operating area.

.09 Small Boat Operator (Operator or Coxswain). As used in this Order, any person who operates a NOAA small boat as defined in Section 6.01 of this Order.

.10 Supplemental Small Boat Policy (SSBP). A compilation of instructions, procedures, regulations, and guidelines derived from operational risk management and best management practices conducted by a NOAA Program for specific small boat operations.

