



FloatPlanWizard Solo Boating Safety Series

Solo Boater Pre-Departure Boat Readiness Guide & Checklist

Check propulsion, controls, power, navigation, safety equipment, and craft-specific systems before leaving alone.

Why this checklist matters

Equipment failures that might be manageable with another capable person aboard can become much harder to handle alone. A pre-departure check reduces avoidable surprises and confirms that essential equipment is accessible.

Readiness is proportional to the craft and trip. A paddler may focus on hull condition, drainage, paddle or spare paddle, flotation, and personal equipment. A powerboat or cruiser adds fuel, batteries, propulsion, steering, controls, dewatering, navigation, anchoring, and electrical systems.

This reference is not a universal regulatory equipment list. Legal requirements vary by vessel, length, propulsion, activity, operating waters, and jurisdiction. Confirm current requirements with the appropriate authority.

What to think about

Propulsion, fuel, power, and control

Check the engine or other propulsion system, fuel quantity, appropriate reserve, batteries, charging, steering, throttle, shift controls, rudder or tiller, and engine cut-off system where applicable.

Fuel calculations are estimates. They do not replace the operator's responsibility to account for actual consumption, reserve, weather, current, detours, and operating conditions.

Water management and navigation

Confirm bilge pumps, drain plugs, cockpit drains, scuppers, and manual dewatering equipment where appropriate. Check navigation lights if they may be needed and verify the chartplotter, charts, compass, and an appropriate backup navigation method.

Safety and contingency equipment

Check required and trip-appropriate PFDs, sound-signaling equipment, visual distress signals, fire extinguishing equipment, first aid, anchor and ground tackle, reboarding equipment, communications, tools, and spares.

For eligible recreational boats, a free U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Vessel Safety Check can help identify missing required equipment, condition issues, and other preparation concerns.

Key things to remember

- Check the systems that move, steer, power, and control the craft.
- Verify dewatering, navigation, signaling, and safety equipment.
- Carry appropriate backup navigation, tools, and spares for the trip.
- Review current legal requirements for the vessel and operating waters.

Boat or craft readiness checklist

Use this checklist before departure. Marking an item does not replace the operator's responsibility to confirm what is appropriate and required for the actual vessel, activity, location, and conditions.

- ☐ Fuel quantity is adequate for the trip.
- ☐ An appropriate fuel reserve is planned.
- ☐ Batteries and charging systems are checked where applicable.
- ☐ Engine or propulsion system is checked.
- ☐ Steering is checked.
- ☐ Engine controls are checked.
- ☐ Engine cut-off system is checked where applicable.
- ☐ Bilge or dewatering equipment is checked where applicable.
- ☐ Drain plugs and drains are correct where applicable.
- ☐ Navigation lights are working if they may be needed.
- ☐ Sound-signaling equipment is available.
- ☐ Visual distress signals are checked where required or carried.
- ☐ Fire extinguishing equipment is checked where applicable.
- ☐ Anchor and ground tackle are ready where appropriate.
- ☐ Navigation equipment is working.
- ☐ An appropriate backup navigation method is available.
- ☐ Required safety equipment is aboard and accessible.
- ☐ Paddle, spare paddle, sails, rigging, or other craft-specific propulsion equipment is checked as applicable.
- ☐ Essential tools and spares are aboard where appropriate.

Related guidance

- [Solo Boating Safety Guide](#)
- [FPW Boat Fuel Calculator](#)
- [U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Vessel Safety Check](#)

Turn the checklist into a real trip plan

A checklist helps you remember the details. FloatPlanWizard helps you organize them into a float plan that can be created, sent to a shore contact, shared, and automatically monitored during an active trip.

For solo boaters, FloatPlanWizard puts the information a shore contact may need into one organized workflow: vessel and operator details, passengers when applicable, route, departure, destination, timing, shore contact, trip sharing, and supported scheduled check-in information.

FloatPlanWizard is built specifically to make float-plan preparation, sharing, and automated trip monitoring practical for recreational boaters - including people who boat alone.

Automated monitoring is not professional human monitoring. FloatPlanWizard does not guarantee live tracking, a current location, alert delivery, distress verification, emergency-services contact, or rescue dispatch.

[FloatPlanWizard.com](https://floatplanwizard.com)
[Read the complete Solo Boating Safety Guide](#)

Safety note: This guide provides general recreational-boating safety information and does not replace applicable laws, official safety guidance, training, seamanship, or the judgment of the vessel operator. Requirements vary by vessel, activity, location, and jurisdiction.

Published August 10, 2026