PRE-LAUNCH BOATING & MARINE SAFETY CHECKLIST

Waterproof / Clipboard-Friendly US Letter Sheet • Free & Ungated

CLIPBOARD FLOAT PLAN SNAPSHOT (Text to a shore contact before departing)

Date: _____ Vessel: _____ Crew #: _____

Ramp/Marina: _____ Destination: _____ Return By: _____

1. MAKE-READY STAGING LANE (Complete Before Backing Down Ramp)

- [ ] **Install & hand-tighten garboard bilge drain plug**
  Always complete in the staging lane before backing onto the ramp.
- [ ] **Remove rear transom tie-down straps & motor transom saver**
  Leave the bow winch strap & safety chain hooked until floating.
- [ ] **Switch battery selector ON; test bilge pump, blower & horn**
  Verify navigation lights if departing near dawn or dusk.
- [ ] **Rig bow & stern dock lines and clip fenders on dock side**
  Pre-stage boat hook and anchor line clear of deck foot traffic.
- [ ] **Unplug trailer wiring harness before saltwater immersion**
  Prevents short circuits and blown tow-vehicle fuses.

2. USCG SAFETY GEAR & EMERGENCY KIT

- [ ] **USCG Type III life jackets for every person + Type IV throwable**
  Check buckle integrity and child sizing (under 13 wear underway).
- [ ] **VHF marine radio charged & tuned to Ch 16 / NOAA WX**
  Do not rely solely on cellular coverage outside sheltered bays.
- [ ] **Visual distress signals (flares / LED) & sound signaling device**
  Confirm expiration dates on pyrotechnic flares.
- [ ] **Charged marine fire extinguisher accessible near helm**
  Check pressure gauge in the green zone and mounting bracket.
- [ ] **Waterproof first-aid kit, registration & boating safety card**
  Store documents and spare keys in a sealed dry pouch.

3. RAMP DROP, ENGINE & DEPARTURE CHECKS

- [ ] **Run bilge blower at least 4 minutes (inboard / sterndrive)**
  Sniff engine compartment for fuel vapors prior to cranking.
- [ ] **Attach engine cut-off switch (ECOS) lanyard to captain**
  Required by federal law on covered vessels under 26 ft.
- [ ] **Verify strong cooling-water tell-tale stream immediately**
  Check gauges, oil pressure, and bilge dry before leaving dock.
- [ ] **Confirm fuel meets Rule of Thirds (1/3 out, 1/3 back, 1/3 reserve)**
  Add extra margin for headwinds, steep chop, or heavy loads.
- [ ] **Send Float Plan & check live NWS marine forecast & tide window**
  Verify inlet ebb/flood timing against forecasted wind direction.

NWS / NOAA MARINE ADVISORY QUICK-REFERENCE

Wind, Wave Steepness, VHF Ch 16 & Live Forecast QR

Official NWS Coastal & Marine Advisories / Warnings

NWS Headline	Typical Trigger	Captain's Action
Small Craft Advisory (SCA)	Sustained winds ~20–33 kt or hazardous seas (region-dependent)	Small vessels (<26 ft) should stay in port or sheltered water.
Gale Warning	Sustained surface winds or frequent gusts 34–47 knots	Hazardous for nearly all recreational vessels. Do not launch.
Storm Warning	Sustained surface winds or frequent gusts 48–63 knots	Life-threatening marine conditions. Remain securely moored.
Special Marine Warning	Sudden convective squalls >=34 kt, waterspouts, or hail (<=2 hr)	Seek safe harbor immediately; watch radar & VHF Ch 16.
Dense Fog Advisory	Marine visibility reduced to 1 nautical mile or less	Reduce speed, post lookout, sound fog signals, monitor radar/AIS.
Rip Current / Surf Advisory	Strong breaking surf & offshore pull near beaches and inlets	Expect steep breaking waves across shallow bars and passes.

Wave Steepness & Inlet Rule of Thumb

Swell Period Ratio = Wave Period (sec) / Wave Height (ft)

- Ratio >= 3.0 (e.g. 3 ft @ 10 s): Smooth, widely spaced rolling swell.
- Ratio 2.0 – 2.9 (e.g. 3 ft @ 7 s): Moderate chop; adjust trim & speed.
- Ratio < 2.0 (e.g. 3 ft @ 5 s): Steep, stacked waves—rough & wet ride.

Wind-Against-Tide Warning: An outgoing (ebb) tide flowing into an onshore wind stacks standing waves sharply in inlets and passes. Time crossings near slack tide whenever wind exceeds 12–15 kt.

VHF Channel 16 Emergency Call Script

MAYDAY (Grave & Imminent Danger to Life or Vessel): Switch to Ch 16 (156.8 MHz), high power (25W). Press PTT:

1. "MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY" 2. "This is [Vessel Name x3]" 3. Exact GPS Lat/Lon or bearing & distance 4. Nature of emergency & persons on board 5. Vessel length/color/type 6. "OVER" & release PTT.

PAN-PAN: Urgent safety issue (disabled engine, minor injury) without immediate peril.

Key Channels: Ch 16 Distress/Hailing • Ch 22A USCG Working • Ch 68/69/72 Non-Commercial • WX1–WX7 NOAA Weather Radio.

Scan for Live Marine Weather, Tides & Interactive Checklist

Get instant Go / Caution / No-Go verdicts tuned to your boat size, live NWS marine alerts, NOAA tide charts, parsed wave steepness, NEXRAD radar, and a 30-second SMS Float Plan—free and installable on your phone.

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