

PUBLIC VESSEL OPERATOR LICENSING IN NEW YORK STATE

Commercial, for-hire passenger vessels are referred to as Public Vessels. The Marine Services Bureau of New York State Parks annually inspects these vessels to ensure they are in good repair and seaworthy so that you and your family can have a safe outing. In New York, you can tell if a boat is an inspected Public Vessel by the letters PV on each side of the bow. The operators of Public Vessels must hold a license.

There are over 400 Public Vessels operating in New York.

What is a Public Vessel?

A Public Vessel is any mechanically propelled vessel (fuel, solar, or electric powered) for which compensation is received. A Public Vessel can be of any size and operated on sole-state waters.

Is the waterway I operate on subject to USCG or NYS Public Vessel licenses/inspections?

United States Coast Guard Waterway you are operating in:	New York State Parks Marine Services Bureau Waterway you are operating in:
Cayuga Lake Delaware River Great South Bay Greenwood Lake Hudson River Lake Champlain Lake Erie Lake Ontario Long Island Sound Mohawk River New York Harbor NYS Barge Canal Oneida Lake Onondaga Lake Oswego River Seneca Lake Seneca River	Most other New York State bodies of water, including: Ballston Lake Canandaigua Lake Chautauqua Lake Great Sacandaga Lake Lake George Lake Placid Saranac Lake Saratoga Lake Skaneateles Lake

SPECIFIC LICENSE TYPES AND REQUIREMENTS¹

Master - A Master's license is required for the operation of any Public Vessel that exceeds any of the following criteria: **65-foot length, 50-ton displacement, or 65 passengers**. The applicant must successfully exhibit to the inspector, during a practical examination, a thorough knowledge of seamanship, ship handling, Navigation Rules, piloting, emergency procedures, and the accepted practices of supervision and leadership of a vessel's crew. A written examination may also be required. The applicant must also, in most cases, have **served at least one season as an Apprentice Master aboard the vessel with a minimum of sixty hours of piloting documented in the vessel's logbook**. A letter of recommendation from the vessel's owner must be submitted with each application for a Master's license.

Joint Pilot & Engineer - This license is for use on smaller vessels, not meeting the criteria for a Master's license that requires only one person for safe operation. The applicant must demonstrate, on a written examination, a general knowledge of small boat handling, engine operation, Navigation Rules, the New York State Navigation Law, the use and maintenance of safety equipment and a thorough knowledge of emergency procedures such as firefighting, man overboard, flooding, etc. The inspector may also require a practical exam.

Apprentice Master - This license is normally the first step for personnel seeking a Master's license on larger vessels. The applicant must demonstrate a **minimum of thirty trips** (documented in vessel's logbook) **as a deck hand on the vessel for which he/she desires a license** and demonstrate the same level of knowledge on a written examination as the Joint Pilot & Engineer. ***If the applicant has held a Joint Pilot & Engineer license for at least one year immediately preceding the application the license can be upgraded to Apprentice Master without examination.* Once the license is issued the licensee may begin training as a Master under the direct supervision of a licensed Master. No person may train to operate or pilot a Public Vessel requiring a Master without first obtaining an Apprentice Master's license. All training of an Apprentice Master must be documented in the vessel's logbook for later reference by the inspector.

Engineer - This license is required on those larger vessels having engine spaces which require tending by someone other than the vessel's operator. In general, any vessel meeting the criteria requiring a licensed Master will also be evaluated for the need to carry an Engineer. The final determination will be made based on the following criteria: a) Any vessel utilizing steam propulsion systems must carry an engineer. b) Any vessel in which the propulsion machinery cannot be completely controlled from the Pilot House must carry an engineer. c) All other vessels will be evaluated on an individual basis.

LICENSE	JOINT P & E	APPR. MASTER	MASTER	ENGINEER
AGE (proof required)	18	21	21	21
BOATING SAFETY COURSE	YES	YES	YES	YES
WRITTEN EXAM	YES - JP&E	YES - unless holding JP&E license	May be required at inspectors discretion	YES - general questions re: power plants, firefighting, etc.
PRACTICAL EXAM	Not Normally Required	At Inspector's Discretion	YES - Vessel must be conned under inspectors observation	YES - Must operate and explain various engineering systems
EXPERIENCE	Thirty hours of experience operating motorboats	One season(30 trips) as a deck hand, or 1 year as a JP&E	Serve as an Apprentice Master under the direct supervision of licensed master; min. of 60 hours bridge time, certified in the vessel's logbook.	One season working in the engine room under the supervision of a licensed engineer. Two months required if candidate is a licensed stationary engineer.

¹ NYS Public Vessel Operator Study Guide (pdf)



How often do I need to have my Public Vessels inspected?

Every year. We typically complete all inspections in the spring. We inspect vessels and offer operator written tests and practical tests during our annual trip to your location. Our inspectors break up the trips by region and, typically, come to your area once. Please be sure to contact us to find out what week our inspectors will be there so you can get your application in by March 31 to get on the schedule. If you aren't ready when they are there, you will likely have to wait until sometime in mid-July.

I operate in both sole state and federal waters. The US Coast Guard inspects my boat- do I also need an inspection conducted by NYS?

Yes, if you also operate in sole state waters.

What is required to take the Joint Pilot and Engineer exam?

You must be at least 18 years old and have proof of having taken a NASBLA approved Safe Boating Course.

Do I need to operate the boat for you during my test?

It depends on your license. If you are testing to be a Captain or Engineer on a larger dinner-boat type vessel, there will be a practical exam onboard your vessel. If you go to a new Master-level vessel, you will need to do a new practical onboard that vessel.

How often do I need to renew my license?

Every year. The license will expire on your original date of issue every year. The annual renewal is just a \$10 payment. Every 5th issue (issue 5, 10, 15 etc) you will receive an open-book, take-home, exam in the mail with your renewal reminder. This is meant to serve as both a refresher as well as to ensure you are familiar with any new NYS boating regulations or PV requirements.

Can I take the test and/or renew my license online?

No. All license exams must be completed in person, proctored by a Marine Inspector. All renewal payments must be mailed to our office. Please contact us for details

Is this the same as a United States Coast Guard Captain's license/ USCG vessel inspection?

No. The USCG only has jurisdiction over vessels operating on Federal waters. Essentially, if your vessel operates on any body of water that flows to the ocean, you will require USCG inspection and license. (Hudson, Mohawk, Great Lakes, Canal system, Seneca, etc) Public Vessel inspections and licenses are the equivalent of this, but on NY sole state waters. All license renewals, inspections, and reporting of accidents/incidents on PVs go through NYS Parks Marine Services Bureau. You will not have to have any correspondence with the USCG. Please contact us to confirm if you are a USCG for-hire vessel or a NYS Public Vessel based on your body of water, if you are unsure. Contact the [National Maritime Center](#) for mariner credentials and licenses.

What is a Certificate of Inspection (COI)?

A Certificate of Inspection is the document that allows you to legally operate with passengers. It must be kept onboard the vessel and it documents all required equipment, crew, and passenger limits. The COI is valid for 54 weeks after your vessel is inspected. It is only issued if you do not have an outstanding invoice. If you have not paid for inspection, the COI is not issued, and you will be operating in violation of the NYS Navigation Law.

If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact us at NYSPublicVessels@parks.ny.gov

I am a New York State licensed guide, do I need to take your exam and have my boat inspected?

If you operate a guide service that uses a mechanically propelled boat for fishing, hunting, or to drop off clients at trail heads or wilderness camps on sole-state waters, you are considered a Public Vessel. You must take the exam and have your boat inspected.

I'm not charging a fixed rate or a ticket, just accepting donations and gas money. Am I still a Public Vessel?

Yes. Unless the boat ride is completely free, any type of compensation received would classify you as a Public Vessel.

I run a hotel/B&B where we provide a captained sunset cruise/water taxi/etc. Is my vessel a Public Vessel, even if I don't charge for boat rides?

Yes. Although the guests may not be paying directly for a boat ride, if they are paying for a room and this is an amenity offered, it is a Public Vessel. This would be an example of indirect compensation.

We have waterski boats at summer camp. Are these all considered Public Vessels?

Yes. Similar to a hotel, although campers are not paying for boat rides, they are paying to attend camp. This is another example of indirect compensation.

What about our camp sailboats?

If they do not have engines, they are not considered Public Vessels.

Marine Inspectors are based in Albany, so inspections and operator exams are scheduled by region. To help us more efficiently serve you, Public Vessel operators should be aware of these general timelines:

- **Late March:** Inspection dates and license renewal reminders are mailed out. If you require a change from your scheduled time, please email or call to request a change as soon as possible.
- **May 1 - July 4:** This is the normal inspection season. If you would like your vessel inspected during this timeframe, you must submit your [Application for Certification of a Public Vessel](#) a *minimum of two weeks* prior to the desired inspection date. While inspectors make every effort to honor preferred inspection dates, please note that appointments are subject to availability and thus submitting applications prior to March 15th, when schedules are finalized and mailed, is recommended.
 - If you miss your scheduled appointment time, fail inspection, and need a re-inspection, or if your inspection request is submitted after inspectors have passed through your region, you may need to wait until after July 4th to have your vessel inspected or to have an inspector conduct an operator exam.
- **July 4 and later:** Inspectors conduct rescheduled inspections and inspections of new vessels acquired after the start of normal inspection season.

[Commercial Vessels - NYS Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation](https://parks.ny.gov/boating/commercial-vessels.aspx)

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