VA's boating safety education laws change July 1

Before you head out on the water, take a boating safety course.

Virginia's Boating Safety Education Compliance Requirement states boaters must take a boating safety education course approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators and accepted by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. The requirement has been phased-in by age group and category since 2009 and will continue to be phased-in over the next several years.

Currently, personal watercraft (jet ski) operators age 50 and younger and motorboat operators age 20 and younger who operate boats with motors of 10 horsepower and greater must complete a boating safety education course and have such proof in their possession while operating a boat or PWC. On July 1, the those requirements change, as all PWC operators, regardless of age, and motorboat operators age 30 and younger who operate boats with motors of 10 horsepower and greater have to have completed a boating safety education course and carry such proof in their possession while operating the vessel.

Boaters can take a classroom course, such as the monthly, one-day classes offered by the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary's Lake Gaston unit (see Lake Happenings on Page 3 for more information), or they can take an Internet course or a challenge exam to meet the requirement.

Classroom courses are taught by volunteer instructors throughout the state, and there are several Internet courses that are accepted by the VDGIF. Once you take a course, carry your course completion certificate or wallet card with you at all times while operating a PWC or motorboat.

For boaters who have taken a boating safety course in the past, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries makes an optional Lifetime Virginia Boating Safety Education Card available. This durable, driver's license-styled card is available for a fee of $10. You can get an application by visiting the website dgif.virginia.gov/boating/lifetime-boater-card/

To learn more about boating laws in Virginia and about boating safety education courses, visit the department's website at dgif.virginia.gov/boating.

Remember, everyone wants to have a safe, enjoyable day on the water. Do your part by wearing your life jacket and taking a boating safety education course.