



CITY OF

NEWPORT BEACH

Harbor Commission Staff Report

September 10, 2025
Agenda Item No. 6.2

TO: HARBOR COMMISSION

PREPARED BY: Paul Blank, Harbormaster - (949) 270-8158
pblank@newportbeachca.gov

TITLE: Discussion of Potential Safety Requirements for Single-Day Small Vessel Rental Customers in Newport Harbor

ABSTRACT:

The Harbor Commission will conduct a discussion regarding potential safety requirements for single-day small vessel rental customers in Newport Harbor. The purpose of this discussion is to explore options that could improve the safety of renters, other harbor users, and the general public by addressing issues such as renter orientation, life jacket usage, operator age or experience, general harbor rules and the rules of navigation awareness. The Commission will consider current practices, review examples from other jurisdictions, and provide input to staff or a Commission Subcommittee on possible approaches for enhancing renter safety while maintaining accessibility to recreational boating in Newport Harbor.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Determine this action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) and 15060(c)(3) of the CEQA Guidelines because this action will not result in a physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly; and
2. Receive and file; or
3. Provide direction to staff or the Newport Harbor Safety Committee on the development of guidelines and requirements related to safety for single-day, small vessel rental customers

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS:

There is no fiscal impact related to this item.

BACKGROUND:

Single-day small vessel rentals, including electric boats, motorized vessels, paddle boards, kayaks, jet skis, and other watercraft, are a popular activity in Newport Harbor. These rentals provide opportunities for residents and visitors to experience the harbor, but also present unique safety and operational challenges. Many rental customers are

inexperienced boaters who may be unfamiliar with harbor rules, safe vessel operation, or navigational responsibilities.

California law requires most vessel operators to obtain and carry a California Boater Card, which demonstrates completion of an approved boating safety course. However, California Harbors and Navigation Code Section 678.11(c)(5) provides an exemption for individuals operating a vessel that is rented for 30 days or less. As a result, most single-day vessel rental customers in Newport Harbor are not subject to the Boater Card requirement. Rental operators typically provide only a brief safety orientation or written instructions prior to departure.

Over the past several years, the Harbor Department has responded to incidents and complaints related to rental vessel operations, including collisions, navigation violations, and improper safety equipment usage. These concerns have prompted discussion on whether additional requirements or standardized practices should be implemented locally to improve safety for both rental customers and the wider harbor community.

DISCUSSION:

The purpose of this agenda item is to initiate a discussion with the Harbor Commission regarding potential safety requirements for single-day small vessel rental customers. Areas for consideration may include, but are not limited to:

- Mandatory renter orientation or safety briefing requirements
- Life jacket availability and usage policies
- Minimum operator age and/or competency requirements
- Standardized educational materials on harbor rules and navigation
- Potential best practices drawn from other harbor jurisdictions

Because state law exempts short-term rental customers from the California Boater Card requirement, the City may wish to explore supplemental safety measures tailored to Newport Harbor's unique conditions. This discussion should assess whether rental operators should meet similar safety standards, identify potential safety gaps, and explore options to ensure renters receive adequate instruction to operate safely and responsibly in our harbor.

Attachment A to this report indicates the requirements for the education of small vessel rental customers in the State of Florida. Attachment B lists the safety requirements for small vessel rental customers in the State of Georgia. Attachment C is signage that was produced by the Harbor Department for rental concession operators at their suggestion and a recent Harbor Summer Summit. The signage lists the most important and relevant harbor rules for rental customers to know. Attachment D is a version of the basic harbor

rules that was printed on a sticker that can be applied to rental vessels in a prominent place that the operator can see.

The Harbor Commission's discussion will provide staff and/or the Newport Harbor Safety Committee, convened in association with current Harbor Commission Objective #6, with input on whether additional requirements should be developed for future consideration by the City Council. The intent is to balance safety improvements with continued accessibility and enjoyment of recreational boating in Newport Harbor.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

Staff recommends the Harbor Commission find this action is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) (the activity will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment) and 15060(c)(3) (the activity is not a project as defined in Section 15378) of the CEQA Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, because it has no potential for resulting in physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly.

NOTICING:

The agenda item has been noticed according to the Brown Act (72 hours in advance of the meeting at which the Harbor Commission considers the item).

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment A – Florida Boating Safety Education Requirements
- Attachment B – Georgia Rental Boat Requirements
- Attachment C – General Harbor Rules Signage
- Attachment D – Harbor Map Sticker