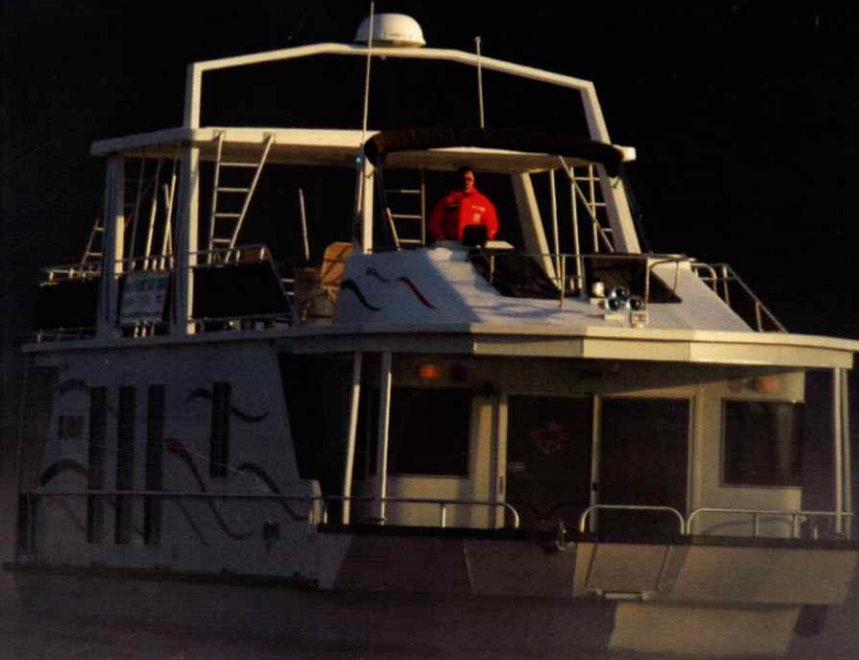


# 10 TONS & No Brakes



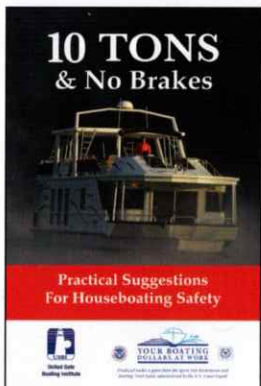
## Practical Suggestions For Houseboating Safety



United Safe  
Boating Institute



*Produced under a grant from the Sport Fish Restoration and  
Boating Trust Fund, administered by the U.S. Coast Guard.*



**Review this booklet  
before you leave the dock.**

1. The information could save your life.
2. The information could save you from injury.
3. The information will provide you with the basics of houseboating safety and save you from a possible citation or fine.
4. The information will make your houseboating experience more enjoyable.

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*Our thanks to the following photographers and companies for taking or providing the houseboat photos: Brady L. Kay, Houseboat Magazine; Bruce Rowe, Renea Delgado & Stan Hattaway of Forever Resorts; Warren Childers, Fantasy Yachts; Kristi Thrasher, Mustang Survival Inc.; Llsa Spaan, Kidde; Scott Croft, TowBoat US, Lake Hartwell, & Bob Green.*

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[www.usbi.org](http://www.usbi.org)



- USBI Member Organizations**
- American Red Cross • American Canoe Association • United States Coast Guard Auxiliary Association, Inc.
  - United States Power Squadrons
  - United States Sailing Association
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The information herein is furnished as a public service by United Safe Boating Institute (USBI) which disclaims any liability from the use hereof.

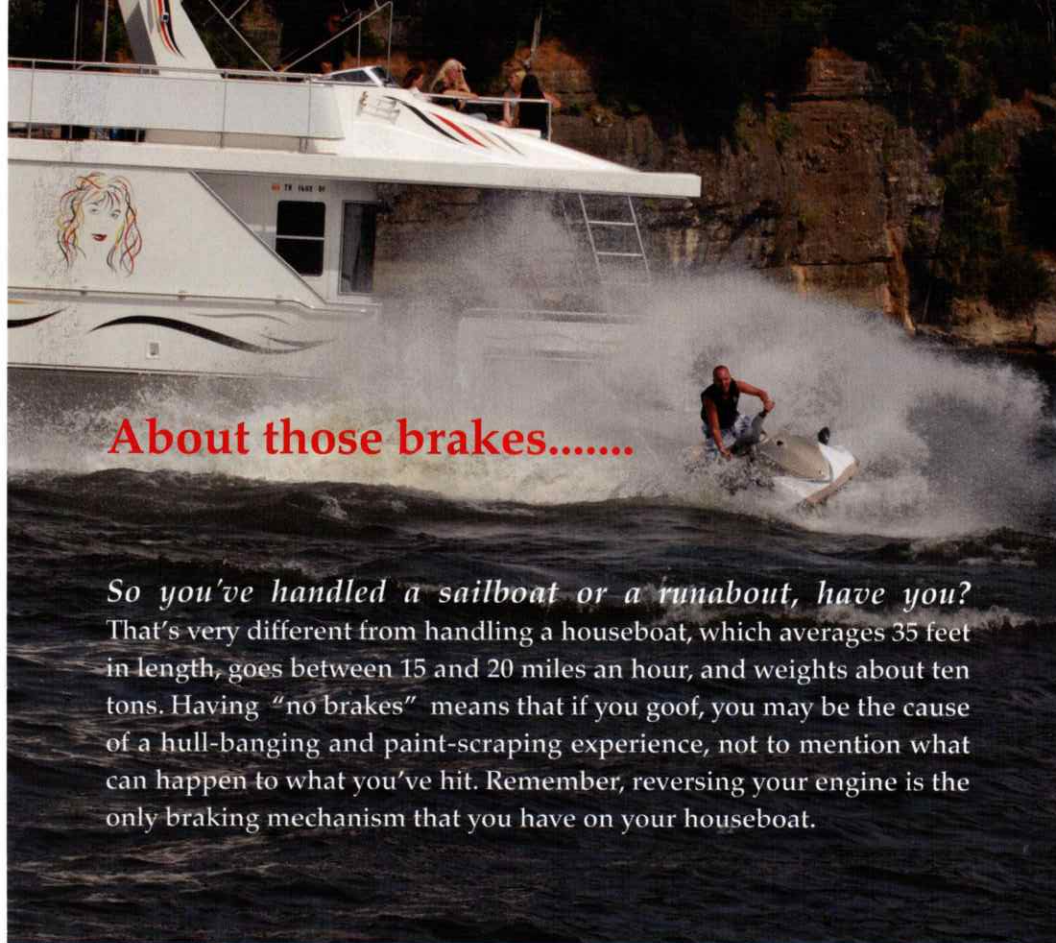
**Houseboating  
has become a popular  
vacation and weekend  
activity.**

A houseboat can literally be your home afloat—but a home that moves.

Although houseboating is a comfortable, leisurely way in which to enjoy the water, there are things you should know before boarding.

To help you put more fun and greater safety into your houseboating, the United Safe Boating Institute offers this *10-Tons & No Brakes* booklet, which will only take you a few minutes to read.

*“Houseboating  
is great fun  
when you know  
the basics.”*



## About those brakes.....

*So you've handled a sailboat or a runabout, have you?* That's very different from handling a houseboat, which averages 35 feet in length, goes between 15 and 20 miles an hour, and weighs about ten tons. Having "no brakes" means that if you goof, you may be the cause of a hull-banging and paint-scraping experience, not to mention what can happen to what you've hit. Remember, reversing your engine is the only braking mechanism that you have on your houseboat.

## If Someone Falls Overboard

Keep the victim in sight at all times. Throw a floatable item (life jacket, ring buoy, large plastic bottle, thermos jug, etc.) to the person overboard and bring the boat around. Never reverse, as the propeller may strike the victim. Approach the person in a manner that keeps them upwind of your boat. Whenever possible, cut the engine until the person is back aboard.



## Docking

Docking can be a real thrill, especially if you forget about not having brakes. Twenty thousand pounds of boat will not stop short when power is cut. It's best to approach the dock while heading against the current, or into the wind, since the houseboat is easier to control that way. Use only enough power to maintain steerageway (your minimum speed with control). Remember, **Speed x Weight = Crunch!** At only two miles an hour, your houseboat can damage a dock as well as itself.

Approach the dock at no more than one mile per hour. Practice working with minimum speed needed to maintain response before your first docking.

## Refueling

Before fueling all passengers should exit the boat. The riskiest operation on a houseboat, strangely enough, is refueling. Smoking, naturally, is taboo during refueling and all electrical appliances and lights should be turned off. Pilot lights on any appliances should also be turned off. If the boat has built-in fuel tanks, keep all doors and windows closed to prevent heavier-than-air-gasoline vapors from seeping inside cabins and the engine compartment. Fill all portable tanks on the dock.

Conduct the "Sniff Test" (your nose) and ventilate before starting the engine. The blower should always be run for a minimum of four minutes and until all gas odors have left the engine compartment.

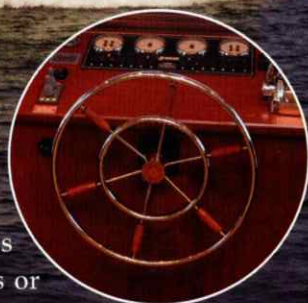




## Keeping Your Bearings

*Unlike a smaller motor boat, a houseboat needs plenty of room and time to maneuver.*

In fact, handling a houseboat requires practice: going through tight spots like locks or into slips requires skill, and quick action. The average houseboat operator is not a professional pilot, and great care is needed to be able to master the vessel in all situations. Remember, when you turn the wheel of a houseboat, the stern (or back part of the boat) is the first to react. Thus, if the wheel is turned to the right, the stern swings to the left. Before getting underway, review operating and safety procedures with all passengers. Locate safety equipment. Have a backup who can operate the boat if you become ill.



## Check Your Local Weather

You should never leave the dock without first checking the local weather forecast because heavy winds can affect a houseboat more than other vessels since it has a greater sail area (the height of a ship's side above the waterline).

Local weather forecasts are available from the TV, radio, local newspapers, online and from weather channels on your VHF-FM radio. Keep alert for special warnings broadcast by the Coast Guard on VHF Channel 22A following a preliminary announcement on Channel 16. State-wide weather forecasts and warnings are available from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) at <http://www.noaa.gov> where local National Weather Service Office telephone numbers are listed.

## First Aid

A houseboat with a first aid kit aboard shows very good planning. Keep a well stocked first aid kit handy and remember to replenish supplies as they are used. At least one crew member should know first aid. First aid should be an essential part of training for all houseboaters.



## Some Rules of the Road

Read and understand government regulations governing the water-way on which you will be traveling. Know the marking systems and the signaling rules: Here are some basic rules:

- Approaching an oncoming boat, keep to the right.
- Know proper maneuvering signals and use them.
- Signal when approaching a blind bend in a river.
- In a crossing situation, if the crossing vessel is approaching from your right you must GIVE WAY.



## In The Still of the Night

A new houseboater should tie up for the night at a marina or (with permission) at a private pier. A novice might not know whether a cove or quiet inlet will be safe. The boat can be left high and dry if the water recedes out of that lovely inlet during the night because of the tides. Locks and dams on rivers can also cause changes in the water elevation. A peaceful river can become a roaring torrent after a hard rain upstream.

If at dusk you can't reach a dock, anchor out of the main channel or tie up to trees near the bank. When about 75 feet from your anchorage, drop the stern anchor from the rear deck. Be careful not to foul your propeller. When the stern anchor is secure, move in closer and tie the bow line to some fixed object on the shore, or secure the bow anchor into the shoreline. Remember, two anchors are required to moor your houseboat adequately.

Be sure the anchors you have are of sufficient weight. The owner's guide for your houseboat will give weight details for anchors.



Photo supplied by NASA and the NSSDC P-37223, GLL-EM6 SSI

## Fire

Be sure you have the proper size and number of fire extinguishers and know how to use them. Fire extinguishers, by the way, are required by law to be on board. You can get this information in the Federal Regulations pamphlet or your state boating guide.



With an engine compartment fire, the chance of explosion is present. If a fire breaks out in the engine compartment, turn the engine off at once. Fire in the galley is dangerous but preventable. Most galley fires are caused when a landlubber-cook puts too much food in a pan and doesn't take into account the pitching and rolling of the boat. Use as little cooking oil as possible and be sure curtains near the stove are tied away from the flame. To fight a fire use the P.A.S.S. procedure. Pull pin, Aim at base of fire, Squeeze handle, Sweep from side to side.

## Dangers Astern

### Carbon Monoxide Poisoning:

Most houseboats have a gasoline generator or propulsion engine aboard and many of these have exhaust ports which exit through the transom beneath or near a swim platform. When passengers are lingering near the swim platform or swimmers are in the water, turn off the generator. Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless and tasteless gas that accumulates rapidly. Carbon monoxide in high concentrations can be fatal in a matter of minutes. Unless the symptoms are severe, carbon monoxide poisoning is often mis-diagnosed as seasickness; however, lower concentrations must not be ignored because the effects of exposure to the gas are cumulative and can be just as lethal. Beware of Carbon Monoxide coming in the cabin while underway or at anchor. Lastly, install a CO detector. It could save a life.



### Propeller Injuries:

Whirling propeller blades beneath the surface of the water astern of your vessel pose another great danger to swimmers. The U.S. Coast Guard reminds you to turn off your engines when swimmers or others are in the water and near your boat. Remember, the whirling propellers are beneath the swim platform and swimmers may not realize the immense danger. Always look astern before starting.

## In Case of Emergencies

**Life Jackets:** Be sure you have the correct type and size life jacket for each person on board. Fit your life jacket snugly and know how to adjust it. Remember, too, that in most states, children under 13 must wear life jackets while aboard. You and your crew should also learn how to put on a life jacket in the water. It is not easy.



## Abandon Ship

Although the likelihood of abandoning ship is improbable, you and your crew should always know where the life jackets are located and how to put them on quickly. Also, make sure the life jacket fits you properly. They come in all sizes and purposes. If it becomes necessary to abandon your houseboat remember:

- Put on your life jacket.
- Call or signal for help.
- Enter the water on the windward side (the side from which the wind is blowing) so the wind doesn't blow the boat over you.
- Stay clear of the propellers, keep together and conduct a head count.

## Tow, Tow, Tow Your Boat:

Although it is a bit embarrassing, at times it may happen that you have to be towed. If you are being towed, remember that the towline is under great stress, and if it breaks it can whip back and cause serious injuries. Be sure that all crew members stay away from the line and wear a life jacket while your houseboat is being towed. Many people will not tow you unless you provide the line (rope), so be sure to have a stout towline aboard for such emergencies.

# 4

## HOUSEBOATING NO NO'S

### No Waterskiing

Although some houseboats are powerful and fast enough to pull skiers, doing so is dangerous because a houseboat is not maneuverable enough. In addition, the large wake produced is not only discourteous to other craft but can be dangerous.

### No Tinkering

Don't tinker with the fuel system or the electrical and control systems. If something goes amiss, ask a qualified technician to help.

### No Operating Under the Influence

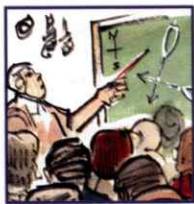
Not only is boating-under-the-influence dangerous, it's against the law. Don't even think about

drinking alcohol and operating your houseboat. As a skipper, you have to keep your wits about you at all times while you're underway. Even one drink (combined with sun, waves, and other elements associated with boating) can impair your senses. Your passengers and your vessel are your responsibility and alcohol and drugs, including prescription drugs, have been proven to be the cause of many boating accidents.

### No Wake

Watch your wake because you may upset small boats and damage others at docks, even a great distance away. Remember, you may be responsible for any damage caused by the wake of your houseboat. You can also be given a citation in a no-wake zone.

# Take a Boating Course



The majority of people who were involved in fatal boating accidents never took a boating course. Whether you operate an inboard, outboard, sailboat, houseboat, personal watercraft or paddle boat, we urge you to take a boating course. The non-profit organizations below, plus many state boating authorities, provide an approved boating course.



As part of its new USPS University, which offers a great variety of advanced boating education courses and seminars, the organization has developed a new basic boating course called **America's Boating Course, 3rd Edition**. What is "cool" about the course is the fact that it can be taken in a classroom, at home or both, and it covers all the essentials and much more. USPS also provides Vessel Safety Checks for recreational boats and personal watercraft to check for proper safety equipment. For information on USPS courses and other programs, call 1-888-FOR-USPS or visit the USPS website at [www.usps.org](http://www.usps.org)



The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, created by an Act of Congress in 1939, is the uniformed Volunteer Civilian Arm of the United States Coast Guard. In promoting safe boating in the U.S.A., it performs a variety of non-profit services, among them: teaching an array of public boating courses including an exciting new course, **"About Boating Safely"**, performing Vessel Safety Checks for recreational boats and personal watercraft to check for proper safety equipment, assisting the U.S. Coast Guard in search and rescue operations and performing safety patrols on navigable and state waterways. For information on Auxiliary courses call toll-free 1-877-875-6296 or visit the website at [www.cgaux.org](http://www.cgaux.org).



United States Sailing Association is the National Governing Body for the Sport of Sailing. USSA is also a membership organization of 44,000 active sailors and sailing groups.

Programs include instructor training, sailing safety, and many other services to sailing groups, such as Safety at Sea seminars. Membership benefits include discounts on sailing publications, videos, and travel; and a weekly online newsletter, e-ussailing. For information call 401-683-0800, write USSA, 15 Maritime Dr. # 1260, Portsmouth, RI 02871, or log onto [www.ussailing.org](http://www.ussailing.org).



**American Red Cross**

The American Red Cross is a humanitarian organization, chartered by Congress, to help people prevent, prepare for and respond to emergencies. The organization trains more than 5 million people annually in first aid, CPR and defibrillation skills, and depends on volunteers and the generosity of the American public to perform its mission. For more information, please visit [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) or join our blog at <http://blog.redcross.org>.



The American Canoe Association (ACA) is the voice of the nation's kayakers, canoeist, and rafters. As the world's largest paddlesports association, the ACA focuses its

efforts on the tenants of Education, Recreation, Competition, and Stewardship. Since many people use kayaks and canoes to enhance their houseboat experience, for information about instruction and safety contact [www.americancanoe.org](http://www.americancanoe.org).



For information on boating classes in Canada call Canadian Power & Sail Squadrons at: 1-888-CPS-BOAT (1-888-277-2628) or visit the website at [www.cps-ecp.ca](http://www.cps-ecp.ca). CPS offers courses, programs and vessel safety checks that are similar to USPS.



For a free Vessel Safety Check contact your local US Power Squadrons or United States Coast Guard Auxiliary unit.



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