

U.S. Department of  
Homeland Security

United States  
Coast Guard



Commander  
United States Coast Guard  
Sector Charleston

196 Tradd Street  
Charleston, SC 29401-1899  
Staff symbol: Inv  
Phone: (843) 720-7751  
Fax: (843) 720-3269

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Dear Marine Enthusiast:

This letter is intended to familiarize you with the laws regarding chartering or operating a vessel for hire. Specifically, you should know that the operator of a charter fishing boat is required by law to have a Coast Guard license.

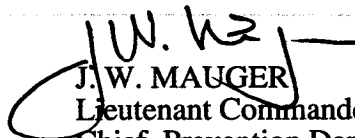
South Carolina offers unlimited opportunities to enjoy activities on the water and often there is no better way to experience this than with a professional guide. However, much like the famous expression, "Let the buyer beware" which covers the pitfalls of making a new purchase, a new expression, "Let the marine enthusiast beware" applies to the boating public. You should be aware that charter fishing boats must have a Coast Guard licensed operator. In other words, if you are being charged in any way for the service provided by the vessel, then the operator of the vessel must have an appropriate Coast Guard license.

The only way to ensure the operator has a license is to see it. The operator of the vessel is required by law to have it during vessel operations, just like you are required to have your driver's license with you when operating a motor vehicle. The Coast Guard license explains the size and type of vessel as well as the type of waterway on which a person is authorized to operate. Please protect yourself and make sure you see a license before the vessel leaves the pier. Most operators post their license on the vessel near the operating station. If the license is not posted, then ask to see it.

The vessel operator is the most important factor in boating safety. This individual must have the experience and training necessary to manage the normal operations and unforeseen circumstances. That is why the Coast Guard has set up a formal licensing process to qualify personnel wishing to operate vessels on navigable waterways. Unlawful vessel operations could be subject to a \$32,500 civil penalty. Additionally, licensed personnel violating boating safety laws may have their license suspended or revoked.

If you have any questions or would like to report an unlicensed operator, please feel free to contact my Investigations Division at (843) 720-7751.

Sincerely,

  
J. W. MAUGER  
Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Coast Guard  
Chief, Prevention Department