

Coastal Breeze 3/21/2021 (submitted by Gene Burson)

As of April 1, 2021, operators of recreational vessels less than 26 feet in length overall (LOA) will be required to use the engine cut-off switch link under certain circumstances, as the U.S. Coast Guard implements a 2018 federal law.

Each year, people are injured or killed when operators fall or get ejected from their boats. The boats will either continue on course until they run out of fuel or may eventually strike an operator in what is called the *circle of death*. "A circle of death" is caused by the rotation of the propeller, which can send the boat into an ever-tightening turn, eventually running over the operator or other occupants who may have been ejected from the vessel.



Submitted Photo

An engine cut-off link, which can be a lanyard or a fob, connects the vessel operator to a switch that shuts the engine off if the operator is displaced from the helm. Physical lanyards are designed to disengage from the engine cut-off switch and shut the motor down when the operator falls from the vessel. Wireless links use an electronic fob that is carried by the operator and activates the cut-off switch remotely when it is submerged in water.

The 2018 law requires that manufacturers of new recreational boats of less than 26 feet LOA with an engine capable of at least 3 horsepower be equipped with an engine cut-off switch. This feature has been in place on many vessels for decades, but as of 2019, it is a federal requirement. Since the wireless technology has become available, some manufacturers have also begun to install wireless engine cut-off switch links as optional or standard equipment.

Since the overwhelming majority of recreational vessels already have an engine cut-off switch, compliance has been the biggest problem. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2021 now obligates recreational vessel operators of vessels under 26-foot LOA to use the engine cut-off link under certain circumstances.

According to the new requirement, “the engine cut-off links must be used when the primary helm is not within an enclosed cabin, and when the boat is operating on plane or above displacement speed.” Some situations where the engine cut-off link will not be required include docking, trailering, trolling, and operating in no-wake zones.

For more information concerning changes in boating laws, visit MarcoBoatingClub.org.