

# COLCHESTER POLICE DEPARTMENT

		SUBJECT: Marine Unit	
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**POLICY:** It is the policy of the Colchester Police Department (CPD) to maintain a Marine Unit to provide timely response and assistance to all marine incidents and to provide enforcement services to ensure safety for persons, property and the environment.

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**I. Scope & Purpose:**

To provide basic guidelines for the safe and efficient operation of the Police Department Marine Unit that will operate as a component of the Patrol Unit to assist in relevant aspects of police work. These guidelines are intended to give general guidance for conducting operations safely and effectively both during patrol and emergency incidents requiring a marine response. It is recognized that the marine environment is unique and may require different approaches or strategies than normal patrol operations in order to ensure a successful outcome.

The Marine Unit's purpose is to reduce crime by enforcement of state laws and municipal ordinances through on water enforcement and boating safety efforts. The unit shall work closely with other local, state and federal agencies through selective enforcement and the sharing of criminal information. Members shall seek to enhance the image of the police department with public relations and interaction with the boating community. The unit will contribute to stronger public safety by maintaining an operational program with Colchester Technical Rescue Dive Team and provide educational programs in Recreational Boating Safety.

## II. Definitions:

- A. Marine Patrol is defined as any patrol that requires the use of a waterborne vessel and/or related equipment to safely patrol and respond to incidents requiring law enforcement or search and rescue. This includes all waters of Lake Champlain and the Winooski and Lamoille Rivers and Colchester Pond.
- B. Marine Patrol is divided into two general categories; General Law Enforcement activities and Search and Rescue.
1. *Law Enforcement* are those that involve education, patrol, enforcement, response and investigation to theft, noise, lost, found and stolen vessels, careless and negligent operation as well as boating while intoxicated and other miscellaneous responses.
  2. *Search and Rescue* are those that involve response, generally emergent, to search for those reported missing, lost or overdue as well as persons reported as injured, sick or in need of rescue from a water or non-land based environment.
- C. Marine Patrol Personal Protective Equipment will include:
- Personal Flotation Device
  - Anti-exposure suits
  - Pyrotechnics and Safety Vest
- D. Marine Unit approved uniform shall include a polo shirt with department insignia approved by the Chief of Police, navy BDU style shorts or long pants, clean sneakers, hiking boots or other sturdy footwear, a baseball style cap and a nylon duty belt. Outerwear approved by the Chief of Police may be worn as needed.
- E. Marine Unit season shall generally be from May through the end of September. One officer will typically be assigned full-time for the season. It is understood that there may be occasions when additional officers may be assigned to the Marine Unit such as special events, crimes, emergencies or other special circumstances. A supervisor's approval shall be sought in these instances and in their absence, the Marine Unit officer may approve such assignment.
- F. Harbormaster – a historical term used to describe the full time Marine Unit officer, as designated by the Chief of Police. Shall be responsible for the overall performance of the Marine Unit, proper paperwork documentation, care of marine assets and other duties as assigned.
- G. Assistant Harbormaster – an officer designated by the Chief of Police to assist the Harbormaster with his/her duties. The Assistant Harbormaster shall be responsible for maintaining a minimum of eight hours a month of “on water” patrol hours.

### III. **Approved Uses of Marine Unit & Call Outs**

- A. The Marine Unit shall patrol at peak boating hours and shall include patrols of inner and outer Mallets Bay and both rivers. Patrols should also include special attention to areas with increased boater usage such as the public boat accesses, Rossetti, Bayside, Niquette Bay State Park Beaches and Causeway Park. General patrol functions shall also include:
1. Patrol all navigable waters in the Town of Colchester including the broad lake, Mallets Bay, Mallets Creek, Winooski River and the Lamoille River to enforce state laws and municipal ordinances and to provide for protection of persons, property and the environment.
  2. Provide emergency services for law enforcement, evidence recovery, body recovery and search and rescue in areas otherwise inaccessible.
  3. Enhance the public awareness and the department's image through high visibility and interaction with the boating community.
  4. Provide education and safety initiatives to the public and boating community.
- B. A variety of requests for services are received through Colchester Police Dispatch and the United States Coast Guard. Many requests may be emergent in nature and require an immediate response by the Marine Unit. Other request may be less serious in nature and require a calculated normal response by the Marine Unit or other appropriate resources. Other appropriate resources are defined as private marina contractors, private tow companies or commercial salvage.
- C. Emergency situations that may require an immediate response from Colchester Police Marine Unit include but are not limited to:
1. Vessel crash with injuries
  2. Mayday distress calls
  3. Pan Pan distress calls
  4. Drowning
  5. Persons missing in the water
  6. Vessel fire
  7. Vessel disabled in storm conditions
  8. Vessel sinking or taking on water
  9. Vessel aground taking on water
  10. Overturned or capsized vessel
  11. Careless and negligent operation (extreme)
  12. Occupied vessel disabled adrift in high winds >25 knots
  13. Medical emergency on a vessel
  14. Law enforcement agencies requesting immediate backup
  15. Any other life threatening condition
- D. Non-Emergency situations, that may require a response from the Marine Unit or other appropriate resources, include but are not limited to:
1. Disabled vessel in good weather (no lake wind advisory)
  2. Vessel out of gas in good weather

3. Vessel with dead battery
4. Vessel aground
5. Distance requirement violations
6. Noise complaints
7. Loose or found vessels
8. Theft complaints
9. Mooring violations
10. Wake violations
11. Water ski complaints
12. Vessels moored in swim areas

#### **IV. Marine unit procedures:**

- A. The marine environment offers complex and sometimes risky work conditions. These conditions can be monitored but cannot always be controlled. Weather and sea conditions and the urgency to minimize loss of life are some of the few factors that dictate safe procedures by the Marine Unit officer. The officer shall take all necessary actions necessary to minimize exposure to their vessel and maintain as safe a working environment as possible while rendering aid and preserving life.
- B. All vessels assigned to the Colchester Police Department should be operated in a safe and efficient manner. No vessel shall be driven recklessly or without regard for the general boating public. Waterborne operations require the Marine Unit operator to always maintain a sharp lookout and be cognizant of the surroundings including, vessel traffic, swimmers, kayaks, canoes, paddleboards, diver down flags and any other object that may be floating or stationary. Waterways are a dynamic environment and continually changing with depth, water flow, debris, storm related items as well as water aircraft and items introduced from shoreline.
- C. Marine Unit officers shall sign on-duty with dispatch when reporting for daily assignment. Officers shall also initiate contact with the United States Coast Guard Station Burlington by phone or VHF Marine radio channel 23 and advise them of the patrol area, marine unit number and number of persons on-board the assigned marine unit.
- D. Prior to operating a department Marine Unit, the operator shall:
  1. Check the overall condition of the vessel at its berth
  2. Disconnect the shoreline power cord
  3. Check the oil and gas reserves (fill if necessary)
  4. Check for oil or water in the bilges
  5. Check fire extinguisher, first aid and defibrillator equipment
  6. Run the bilge pump
  7. Wash vessel as needed
  8. Start the outboard engines
  9. Activate navigation electronics
  10. Activate VHF and UHF receivers
  11. Activate 800 trunked radio for Clinton County

12. Secure or stow loose items
  13. Untie and secure dock lines
- E. When securing a department Marine Unit and at end of shift, the operator shall:
1. Fill fuel tank and oil reserves
  2. Securely tie the vessel to multiple cleats
  3. Turn off outboard motors
  4. Turn off all two way radios
  5. Connect shoreline power
  6. Turn off navigation equipment
  7. Secure pfd's, binoculars etc.
  8. Lock all compartments
  9. Secure department laptop
  10. Wash vessel as needed
  11. Sign off duty with USCG
- F. When operating a department vessel all Marine Unit officers shall wear a personal flotation device (PFD) while underway. Underway shall be defined as when not securely tied to a dock, mooring ball or other structure. Some special events or assignments may allow the officer to deviate from a standard personal flotation device or may not allow the wearing of the device at all. These instances are very rare and the safety of the officer shall be paramount over need for comfort or ease of movement.
- G. While state law allows for law enforcement and public safety vessels to disregard the "no wake" 200 foot distance requirements, all Marine Unit vessels shall be operated at or below no wake speed during normal patrol functions. Knowing that the patrol area includes the Winooski and Lamoille Rivers, no wake speed shall be utilized unless circumstances dictate an emergency operation or during enforcement activities. River operation is inherently dangerous with hidden objects and rapidly changing geography and operating speeds should be reasonable, prudent and safe.
- H. When operating a department vessel during inclement weather, reduced visibility or at times when conditions exist that limits the operating capability of the vessel and operator, all available navigational means shall be utilized. This includes but is not limited to compass, radar, infrared camera systems, gps or any other available means. It is the boat operator's responsibility to keep a sharp lookout at all times, reduce speed and post a lookout forward.
- I. Boarding of Vessels - Vermont law gives authority to law enforcement officers to stop, board and inspect boats for documents, licenses, permits of the operator and to conduct safety inspection for required equipment.
- a. When boarding or approaching vessels for inspection or other reasons, officers shall take care and caution to avoid a casualty to their vessel or the vessel in question. On-water safety inspections or boarding shall be avoided during rough seas or if conditions are not favorable to allow safe mooring. During safety inspections all attempts shall be made to keep the inspection of permits, documents and required equipment to short

duration unless the inspections or examination leads to criminal or civil violations. A standard Colchester Police Marine Inspection form shall be completed when boarding vessels and a copy delivered to the inspected vessel as well as a current year inspection decal.

- b. All approaches to vessels for boarding or mooring shall be on the downwind side of the vessel in which the boarding officer intends to board. When this is not applicable, the marine officer shall make all attempts to board or moor in a safe and cautious manner.
- c. The Marine Unit officer should conduct marina inspections of vessels at the docks of local marinas when weather or time allows. This procedure provides a positive way to contact the public without having to take enforcement action. Contacts at marinas promote a cordial relationship with the boating public and increases boating education. Officers may also visit the local access ramps and conduct inspections without hindering the ability of the public to utilize the ramp and surrounding area when activity is high.

**V. Responsibility:**

Marine Unit boat operators shall be responsible for the safe operation of all vessels assigned to the unit as well as the following:

- 1. All persons on-board any department vessel
- 2. All town owned equipment assigned to the Marine Unit
- 3. Maintenance of all vessels/vehicles assigned to the Marine Unit
- 4. Promptly report in writing any damage, injury or defects of any vessel or vehicle assigned to the Marine Unit.
- 5. Assure that no Marine Unit is parked, berth or left unattended without securing the vessel and all equipment for safe keeping.
- 6. Assuring that unit vessels are operated in a manner consistent with proper boating etiquette unless emergency conditions make this impossible.

**VI. Personnel Authorized to Operate Marine Unit Assets:**

Only persons authorized by the Chief of Police or her/his designee shall be permitted to operate any marine unit assets. This shall include watercraft, trailers or other specialized equipment. All vessel operators shall have a valid VT Boater Safety Certificate (or equivalent safety training) and have demonstrated proficiency prior to operating in a solo capacity. No alterations shall be made to marine unit assets without the approval of the Chief of Police or designee.

**VII. Transportation of Prisoners:**

At all times the safety of persons aboard any Marine Unit vessel shall be of utmost importance. Realizing that the marine environment is a dynamic operation and normal police tactical considerations may not apply, the Marine Unit officer can deviate from standard control and restraint procedures. The risk of drowning,

injury or falls overboard is great when dealing with suspects and victims. The simple nature of small vessels, limited work platform space, sea conditions and single officer patrol vessels, limits the Marine Unit officers available decisions. Whenever possible, two officers shall be onboard when transporting a prisoner or suspect. If practical, a PFD shall be placed on a detained, arrested or secured prisoner prior to handcuffing the prisoner. If the Marine Unit officer perceives a threat, the suspect or prisoner shall be restrained prior to movement between vessels. Nothing in this section shall prohibit the Marine Unit officer from taking reasonable efforts to safe guard themselves, the vessel and its crew.

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