

## Engine Switch Cutoff Requirement – Federal Law Change

Source: United States Power Squadrons®



**America's Boating Club®  
Pamlico Sail & Power Squadron**

On April 1, 2021 a new federal law went into effect that requires the operator of any powerboat with an "installed" ECOS (Engine Cut-off Devices) to wear the ECOS link. The link is usually a coiled bungee cord lanyard clipped onto the operator's person, PFD or clothing and the other end attached to the cut-off switch, but there are plenty of variations on the market, including electronic wireless devices. The law applies on all "Navigable Waters of the US". The law applies to "Covered Recreational vessels" which means any motorized boat manufactured after 2018 with 3 or more horsepower that is less than 26 feet in length.

Exceptions to this law include vessels where

- The main helm is within an enclosed cabin
- The motor is incapable of 115 pounds of static thrust
- or the vessel isn't operating on plan, for example while fishing or docking

When an operator is wearing a link while underway, the engine will cut-off if the operator is separated from the operating area, an occurrence that can happen if the operator is ejected from the vessel or falls within the vessel. The shutdown of the engine is essential for safety reasons. If the operator is ejected from the vessel, the shutdown may prevent the operator from impacting the vessel's spinning propeller, and may aid the operator in safely returning to the drifting vessel.



The terms Engine Cut-Off Switch (ECOS) and Engine/Propulsion Cut-Off Devices are used interchangeably to denote a system that disables the propulsion engine when the operator is unexpectedly displaced from the vessel. Most U.S. boat manufacturers have voluntarily installed an ECOS on their boats for decades. It's important to know that, if your boat is equipped with a Cut-Off Switch, the law is that it must be used.

## Why you should wear your Engine Cut-off Switch link?

A typical three-blade propeller running at 3,200 rpm can inflict 160 impacts in one second so it is critical that you are aware of what is going on around you. Be aware:

- People in the water may not be visible from the helm
- Account for passengers before starting the engine

- Inform passengers about propeller hazard areas
- Be alert in congested areas and near swimming zones
- Take extra precaution around towed watersports
- Never permit riding on the bow, gunwale, transom, seatbacks, or other locations where an occupant could fall overboard
- Children should be watched carefully at all times – it only takes a second to fall overboard
- You would childproof your home so think about childproofing your boat
- Establish rules for swim platform use, boarding ladders, and seating
- If someone falls overboard, STOP the boat; once clear begin recovery procedures
- Warning - Never put your boat in reverse to pick someone up out of the water, always circle around going forward while keeping the person in the water visible to the boat operator at all times.

For more information regarding recreational boaters responsibilities, visit the link below:  
<https://uscgboating.org/recreational-boaters>

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