

Maryland exempts large yachts from Bay Pilot requirement.

Watching big ships move up and down the Bay is a fun pastime for those of us who spend our time on the Bay fishing or sun bathing. Each large vessel you see is required, by law, to hire a licensed Chesapeake Bay Pilot. The cost of a Bay Pilot can be up to \$268/hour, with a two hour minimum. But the cost is well worth the benefit of avoiding an accident. The largest commercial ships can draw 47 feet in a 50 foot channel. Without the assistance of a licensed Chesapeake Bay Pilot the largest vessels might ground, or dump materials that would harm the Bay.



But the law also required large pleasure boats to engage a Bay Pilot, too. Any movement within the navigable waters of the Bay required a Bay Pilot, including a shift from a berth to a fueling pier. And as you might imagine, this cost has kept many large pleasure boats away from the Chesapeake region. “These vessels spend tens of thousands of dollars alone on one fuel bill, plus money on provisioning, local entertainment, tourism and repairs,” said Jessie Bowling of Baltimore Marine Centers, which operates five marinas in the harbor, according to an April 16, 2015 article in the Baltimore Sun. Many speculated that the old law was an economic anchor to be cut away.

State Delegate Peter Hammen, of Baltimore’s 46th District, which covers the entire waterfront for the Port of Baltimore, recently introduced an emergency bill to exempt large pleasure boats from the Bay Pilot requirement. Governor Hogan signed the measure into law on Wednesday, April 15, 2015.

This means that certain large pleasure boats are no longer required to hire a Bay Pilot. Specifically, this exemption covers:

- Recreational vessels less than 200 feet long, and those with less than a 12 foot draft.

- If they possess a valid federally issued cruising license; and

- If they are not engaged in commercial service; and

- If they are not carrying passengers for hire.

A “recreational vessel” is defined by federal law and means a vessel being manufactured or operated primarily for pleasure or leased, rented, or chartered to another for the latter’s pleasure. “Commercial service” includes any type of trade or business involving the transportation of goods or individuals, except for service performed by a combatant vessel. “Passenger for hire” means a passenger for whom money is collected and paid to any person having an interest in the vessel. Federal cruising licenses exempt pleasure boats of certain countries from having to undergo formal entry and clearance procedures such as filing manifests and obtaining permits to proceed as well as from the payment of tonnage tax and entry and clearance fees at all but the first port of entry. These licenses can be obtained from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Port Director at the first port of arrival in the United States. Cruising licenses are normally valid for up to a year.

Keep a sharp lookout for additional traffic on the Bay.

Now, for those of use spending our time on boats well under the 200 foot limits of this exemption, what does all this mean? Hopefully, it means more traffic on the Bay. By lessening the cost to travel up the Chesapeake to Baltimore and Annapolis, the exemption may well generate additional gross revenues for those businesses servicing large vessels and their guests.

It also means we must be much more aware of our surroundings while out on the open water of the Bay. If the new law has its intended effect, we will be joined by larger vessels moving without the assistance of trained Bay Pilots. These larger vessels will be in close proximity as we move in and around the Bay's larger harbors and shipping channels. We all remain responsible for our own safety, so keep a sharp lookout, and wave to our new visitors!



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