

US BOATING RULES & REGULATIONS

When bringing a Canadian boat into the US, it's necessary to stop at Point Roberts Custom dock. You show your vessel's papers and your passport and, if they like you, you're on your way.

Vessel Entrance and Clearance Statement

However, if it's your plan to moor the boat permanently in the U.S. (and not just come for a visit), you'll need to do more paperwork. This involves getting a "Vessel Entrance or Clearance Statement," otherwise known as a CBP Form 1300. Apparently not all the customs officers are trained for this clearance, so it's a good idea to phone a day or two ahead to ensure there'll be one on duty when you arrive at the dock from Canada. Check their hours of operation and leave an hour or so for the clearance procedure.

Once tied up at the dock, phone the Point Roberts custom office and announce your arrival. If it's high tide, you may pick up a Canadian cellphone tower. If not, you'll need to set your phone for Roaming. If you're there for a Form 1300, this form requires your tonnage, official number, etc.. If your boat is licensed (and not registered) remember you'll need to show your bill of sale to prove you legally own the boat. If your boat is registered, the registration certificate is proof of ownership. The Americans take cash only, in US dollars. Have the exact amount. A form 1300 will cost you US \$13:00.

Washington State Out-of-Country Vessel Identification Permit

If your plan is to moor the boat permanently in Washington State, you need to obtain a Washington State Out-of-Country Vessel Identification Permit. You can obtain this from Washington State's outlying office in Cost Cutters in Blaine. This is a permanent identification document that is valid for the life of the boat. It must be obtained and displayed within 61 days of the boat's taking up permanent moorage in Washington State. This permit comes on a scruffy piece of cardboard on which the clerk prints your "Perm" number. Presently, the web says the cost is a measly \$5:00! Take US cash again. Nothing else is accepted. Also take all your own and your ship's papers with you, remembering the caveat about licensed boats and the bill of sale.

Note that this Washington permit relates to the boat. It can be transferred to the new owner should you sell the boat. The new owner has to show up in person with all the documents. The permit must be clearly displayed on the boat whenever the boat is in Washington waters. Most people seem to stick it in a side window and leave it there.

The marina where you moor will want a copy of your boat insurance and will also tell you what dollar liability you must carry. I have had my insurance company fax the necessary information to the marina. They seem to be used to these kinds of requests.

If you've paid the Canadian taxes on your boat, you'll likely want to cross the border a few times during the sailing season - to tie up or anchor in Canadian waters. If, on the other hand, you cross

the border into Canada and do neither of these things before returning to the States, you are not considered to have ever left the US. The exception is if you have contact e.g. rafting with a boat, while in Canadian waters.

Small Vessel Reporting System

If your boat is moored in the US and you intend to cross the border several times, to save yourself a great deal of hassle with both border authorities, it makes sense to join the Small Vessel Reporting System (US) and CANPASS (Canadian). You can enroll online without an interview for the U.S. System if you have Nexus or a Canadian Border Boat Landing Permit (Form I-68). Both these are available to Canadian citizens and permanent residents. For CANPASS, you have to download a form and send it off in the mail. Both plans were developed to enhance legitimate travel of private boaters across the U.S. and Canadian borders. They are both voluntary.

Once you and your boat are enrolled in the American Small Vessel Reporting System, you will be given the magic “BR” number i.e. Boater Registration number. What typically happens when returning to the US from Canadian waters is this:

The master of the vessel calls Small Boat Reporting by cellphone (1-800-562-5943) as soon as you enter U.S. waters. (Don't do this, say, at 9 pm, or it'll take all day.) You make a verbal declaration of yourself, your passengers and goods acquired abroad. Typically they'll ask where you are. Say you're in US waters and the conversation will continue! Mention you have a BR number very early on. For example, I might say, “This is sailing vessel Atrevida with two BR members on board requesting clearance into my home port, Semiahmoo Marina.” You'll get the usual questions e.g. about who is on board; everyone has to have a BR number or else it's off to Point Roberts with you. The U.S. is much more interested in establishing exactly who you are rather than what you've got. They may ask you the number of your marina slip. Once they asked me what “Atrevida” meant. I told them. They made a note, and asked me again a few months later! They'll also ask you for the report number you were given by CANPASS when you entered Canada. Finally, the Americans will give you an entry number which completes the entry process.

If they're happy with you and you're cleared, it doesn't seem to matter where you are. With the CANPASS system, you have to make a date by time and at least “touch” the dock at a CANPASS approved location. With Small Boat Reporting, I've been given clearance and an entry number when travelling from the Gulf Islands to an overnight anchorage at Stuart Island.

Small Boat Reporting still retains the right to do a visual inspection. So if I'm heading back to Blaine from the Fraser River, say, I'll always make the phone call when I'm near Point Roberts. I've never been called for a visual inspection in 7 years of using the system, but it could always happen.

Radio Station Licence

You don't need a radio station licence in Canada for your onboard VHF radio. You do, of course, need a Restricted Operator Certificate (Maritime) to transmit on it. Strange as it may seem, while Industry Canada does not require pleasure vessels within Canadian waters to have a station license for their VHF radios, it does require them to have a station license when travelling within foreign waters. The radio station licence is transferrable to the new owner when you come to sell.

US Customs and Border Protection Decal

The final document you need is a U.S. Customs and Border Protection DECAL if your boat is 30' or more. You buy one annually for \$27.50 and display it on the boat. They go from January 1 to December 31. Cost not pro-rated. You may be asked for the number of your DECAL when you clear customs via Small Boat Reporting. DTOPS (Decal/Transponder Online Procurement System) is the online site to order it. The site is almost impossible to navigate. You can have them send you a pre-printed User Fee paper application form by calling 317 298 1245.

The DECAL is assigned to a specific boat and can be transferred to the new owner when you sell the boat.

Anchoring in the fog

Pleasure vessels of our size are required to have a hand bell aboard to ring when anchored in foggy conditions. I have been told this may be an item of equipment looked for if stopped for an inspection by the USCG.
