

Captains' License Information

Licenses are required in order to legally carry passengers for hire. This includes charters for fishing, sightseeing, diving, transportation, teaching, bareboat or any use which is considered a "passenger for hire" situation. Many companies require them for boat deliveries.

A passenger for hire is where compensation is exchanged for services provided. If an operator is hired to transport a passenger and is paid directly, or indirectly by that passenger or agency. That operator shall be a licensed USCG captain.

This license is properly termed "Operator of Uninspected Passenger Vessels" (OUPV) and is commonly referred to as the "6-pack" or "Charterboat Captain's License". The word "uninspected" means that the equipment required and the design of the boat are less regulated. "6-pack" refers to the 6 passenger limitation placed on the license. OUPV licenses are issued with a particular route. Your license can be for the Great Lakes, Inland routes meaning bays, sounds, rivers, lakes, etc. of the US or Near Coastal routes out to 100 miles offshore. All OUPV licenses are for 100 Gross Tons vessels (about 100 feet, more or less). The OUPV license may be upgraded to a Master license.

Limited OUPV – same as a OUPV with the following exceptions

1. The license only applies to a specific body of water, and is not valid other than that body of water.
2. The amount required of sea time is less

The approval of the Limited OUPV is up to the discretion of the USCG.

All other USCG requirements apply, no exceptions

A Master license is required if you operate "inspected" vessels. Inspected vessels are allowed to carry more than 6 passengers. To become Inspected, the vessel must be built in accordance with rigid USCG Commercial Vessel Inspection standards.

- Application
 - A Homeland Security / FBI background check will be performed
 - Fingerprinted
 - Physical taken within 12 months
 - Approved drug test taken within 6 months
 - Approved CPR and First Aid taken within 12 months
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- 90 days service in the last 3 years on vessels of appropriate tonnage.

- Near Coastal: 360 days deck service in the operation of vessels, including 90 days service on ocean or near coastal waters.
- Great Lakes/Inland: 360 days deck service in the operation of vessels, including 90 days service on Great Lakes.
- Inland: 360 days deck service in the operation of vessels.
- Towing Endorsement: Must request and pass towing endorsement examination.

- 90 days service in the last 3 years on vessels of appropriate tonnage.
- Near Coastal: 720 days of service steam, motor, or auxiliary sail vessels on ocean or near coastal waters (360 days inland is acceptable)
- Great Lakes and Inland: 360 days service steam, motor, sail/aux. sail vessels including 90 days on Great Lakes waters
- Inland: 360 days service steam, motor, aux. sail vessels on any waters
- Rivers: 360 days service steam, motor, aux. sail vessels on any waters
- Sailing Endorsement: Must submit evidence of 360 days of service on sail or auxiliary sail vessels (service obtained before license OK).
- Towing Endorsement: Must request and pass towing endorsement examination or complete course.

All USCG licenses must be renewed every 5 years. No written exams are required. You will need a renewal application, a physical and an approved drug test.

The US Coast Guard issues all Captain Licenses. The Regional Examination Centers (REC) provide the applications and plenty of information about requirements and when and where to take the exams.

Some commercial companies have qualified and are approved by the Coast Guard to administer some of the exams. They often provide exam-preparation classes for a fee.