



Manatee County  
Tax  
Collector

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# Boats

## General Information

### What is required to title and register a boat in Florida?

For information regarding Florida title transfers, read our [Florida title transfer publication](#). For an estimate of fees, visit our [motor vehicle fees page](#).

### I just purchased a boat and outboard motor from the same seller. Are there any sales tax breaks on the purchase price of the complete rig?

Provided you bought the boat and outboard motor together in a "casual sale" (i.e., a non-dealer sale), you may be exempt from the payment of sales tax on the purchase price of the **outboard motor only**.

You will need to provide an itemized [bill of sale form](#) that includes a perjury clause or notarization and which breaks down the purchase price of the boat and the outboard motor. Sales tax will then be calculated on the purchase price of the boat minus the outboard motor.

This exemption **does not** apply to any other type of motor (e.g., inboard) or trailer purchased from the same seller.

Visit our [motor vehicle general information page](#) for information about registering your trailer.

### When am I exempt from paying sales tax on a boat?

There are very specific circumstances in which you **may be exempt** from paying sales tax on the purchase price of a boat:

- When you move from another state and you've been the titled owner in that state for at least 6 months or longer.
- When a boat is given to you from an individual for no consideration in return (i.e., no money exchanges hands).
- When you trade boats with someone else and no additional consideration is exchanged.
- When you inherit a boat from someone who is deceased.
- When you have already paid sales tax on the boat. A bill of sale or invoice from the dealership or an out-of-state registration that lists the purchase price of the boat, amount of sales tax paid, the purchaser's information and the boat details (year, make and hull identification number) would be required to prove sales tax paid.

**Other situations may qualify for a full or partial sales tax exemption.**

### Are any boats exempt from titling or registration?

**The following are not required to be titled or registered with an FL number or decal:**

- Boats used exclusively on private lakes and ponds
- Boats used exclusively as a ship's lifeboat
- Non-motor-powered boats less than 16 feet in length
- Boats owned by the U.S. government

However, for example, if you own a non-motor-powered boat less than 16 feet in length but eventually decide to place a motor on it, you will **then** have to title/register it.

If you have any questions about using a dinghy in emergency situations, visit the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's [law enforcement contacts page](#) for assistance. You can also visit the Florida Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles' [vessels page](#) for additional information on titling and/or registering boats.

### How do I obtain an antique boat decal, and how much does one cost?

**For a boat to be considered antique**, it must:

1. Be at least 30 years old.
2. Be used for non-commercial purposes.

3. Be powered by its original type power plant.
4. Have an assigned FL/DO number and a current registration. (If it is expired, you can renew through our [online registration renewal service](#).)

If all of the criteria is met, the boat is eligible for an antique boat decal.

Next, a properly completed [antique vessel registration certification form](#) must be submitted and signed by the owner or a licensed marine surveyor certifying that the boat meets the definition of an antique boat. Once the form is complete, you will need to mail it along with a copy of your current boat registration to the address listed on the form. (**There is no charge for an antique decal.**)

The antique decal will be mailed to you from Tallahassee upon acceptance of your application. Once an antique decal is issued to a boat, it remains current for the life of the boat, provided the boat continues to conform to the definition of an antique boat.

However, you are still required to renew the registration annually (or biennially) and display an unexpired decal in addition to the antique decal. You can conduct a local business search (online or via the phone book or yellow pages) for the phone numbers of local marine surveyors or call the Marine Patrol at [\(888\) 404-3922](#) for assistance.

## Am I required to document my boat with the US Coast Guard?

All boats five net tons or more that meet the criteria of a commercial boat as defined by the US Coast Guard must be federally documented. However, pleasure yachts five net tons or more are not required to be federally documented; it is at the option of the owner(s).

**For additional documentation instructions and requirements**, visit the [National Vessel Documentation Center website](#) or contact them by phone at [\(800\) 799-8362](#).

**If you are in the process of documenting your boat with the US Coast Guard**, our office can issue you a temporary registration, which includes an FL number and a decal for use while awaiting your official documentation with the US Coast Guard. In order to receive an FL number and decal, you will need to be present with a state-issued license or ID card and provide a letter or postcard from the US Coast Guard that proves your application has been filed and is pending approval. Fees will be due based on the length of the boat and how you will be using it (i.e., commercial or pleasure purposes).

**Once you receive your official documentation papers**, you will need to return to our office with your temporary registration, official documentation papers and your state-issued license or ID card. Our office will issue you a regular registration based on the use of your boat (i.e., commercial or pleasure) for approximately \$4.25.

**If your boat is already documented in another state**, just bring in your official documentation papers from the US Coast Guard along with your state-issued license or ID card. (Note: All persons named as owners on the documentation papers must be present with identification.) Complete a [non-titled vessel registration application](#), then we can issue you a registration and decal. Fees will be due based on the length of the boat and how you will be using it (i.e., commercial or pleasure purposes). If documented in your name(s) less than 6 months, sales tax may be applicable unless you can prove that you paid a sufficient amount already in your previous state. If this is the case, be prepared to present a dealer's invoice or other official statement that itemizes the sales tax paid.

## Replacing a lost boat title

Bring in your valid (unexpired) state-issued license/ID or valid (unexpired) passport along with the FL number for the boat. For additional details and requirements, read our [duplicate title publication](#).

## I just bought a boat, but the seller lost the title. I want to transfer the title into my name and get a decal. What do I need to do?

The quickest way to get the title in your name is to contact the seller and arrange for them to meet you at our office. Both of you will need to present your valid (unexpired) state-issued license / ID card or valid (unexpired) passport. (This includes any co-sellers and/or co-purchasers.)

The seller will apply for a duplicate title at the same time it is transferred into your name, and at that time you will be issued a registration and plate/decal. Note: Double title fees will apply, as there is one fee for the seller and one for the buyer.

For additional details and requirements, read our [duplicate Florida title publication](#) and [Florida title transfer publication](#).

## I just bought a new/used boat trailer. How do I transfer it into my name and get a license plate?

Any trailer that weighs **less** than 2,000 pounds is not required to be titled; it is only registered. Read our [boat/utility trailers publication](#) for information regarding the documentation required to register your trailer.

Trailers that weigh 2,000 pounds or **more** must be titled and registered. Visit our [motor vehicle general information page](#) for more details.

Registration fees for boat trailers are based on weight. The heavier the boat trailer, the higher the registration cost.

## I bought a boat from out of state, and that state doesn't title boats. How do I get a Florida title and decal?

The current owner will need to provide you with their out-of-state registration and a bill of sale with perjury clause or notarization. (Verification of non-titling states will be completed.) If there is a place to transfer ownership on the out-of-state registration, it must be properly completed. You will need to bring both of these documents to our office along with your valid (unexpired) state-issued license/ID or valid (unexpired) passport. Title fees, registration fees and sales tax will apply.

## I would like to change my boat classification from commercial to pleasure (or vice versa). What do I need to do?

Bring in your state-issued license or ID card along with the registration or the FL number for the boat. The fee will be approximately \$4.25. If it is during the renewal period, only the renewal fee would be due. A [change of classification application](#) must be completed.

## Where should the FL number and decal be displayed on a boat?

**The FL number and decal must be displayed as follows:**

- The FL number must be painted or affixed to both sides of the bow (**forward half**) of the boat.
- The FL number must be in block letters at least three inches high.
- The FL number must read from left to right and must contrast in color with the hull and be in legible condition at all times.
- The letters must be separated from the numbers by a space or hyphen equal to the letter width.
- The FL number issued to a boat is permanent and remains with the boat as long as it is operated or stored in Florida.
- The decal must be displayed on the front port (left) side of the boat within six inches of the FL number. It may be placed immediately before or after the FL number. (**Any decals for a previous year must be removed from the boat.**)

**On a documented boat**, the decal must be displayed on the front port (**left**) side of the boat and may be affixed to a window or windshield on the front port (**left**) side of the boat.

**When a dealer is demonstrating, testing or promoting a boat**, the FL number and decal should be affixed to a removable sign that can be temporarily (but firmly) mounted upon or attached to the boat.

For additional information, read the state's [Facts for Florida Vessel Owners publication](#).

## Are you selling a boat?

An owner or co-owner who has transferred or sold a boat is required to notify the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV) within 30 days after the sale or transfer to satisfy the requirement for limitation of liability. This can be done with a [Notice of Sale form](#) or by detaching and completing the top third of the Florida title, above the perforation, and mailing it to the DHSMV at the address listed on the form. For additional requirements, read our [vehicle, boat, and mobile home sale publication](#).

## Completing a boat title transfer by mail

If you are completing a title transfer by mail, we require you to use our [title by mail page](#) service. Due to the difficult nature of these transactions we suggest, whenever possible, titling boats in person or using the [power of attorney form](#) to appointment someone to act on your behalf.

## I have a complaint against a boat dealer; who should I contact?

Unfortunately, there is no agency that specifically handles complaints against boat dealers.

Consumers can try using the [Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Affairs' Consumer Complaint Form](#) or contacting that agency by phone at 1.800.435.7352.