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Sophia's Law and Carbon Monoxide Detectors on Motorboats

Sophia's Law came into effect in the State of Minnesota on May 1, 2018. It was named for seven-year-old Sophia Baechler, who died from carbon monoxide poisoning while boating on Wayzata Bay near Lake Minnetonka. A hole in an exhaust pipe leaked carbon monoxide into the cabin where Sophia went to lie down; she succumbed several minutes later.

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless, tasteless gas – undetectable by human senses. The symptoms of poisoning are headache, nausea, dizziness, weakness and eventually, loss of consciousness. The gas is released whenever fuel is burned and is especially dangerous in enclosed spaces and inadequate ventilation.

The law requires motorboats, regardless of fuel type, with an enclosed accommodation compartment must be equipped with a functioning marine CO detector system installed according to the manufacturer's instructions. An enclosed accommodation compartment is defined as having all three of the following spaces: designated sleeping accommodations, a galley area with a sink, and a head (toilet) compartment.

Detectors must be located to monitor the atmosphere in the main cabin and each sleeping area. Carbon monoxide detectors manufactured prior to 2012 should be replaced.


All gasoline-powered motorboats with any enclosed occupancy compartment must display three CO poisoning warning stickers as directed by law. While other states such as Washington have passed laws requiring boats to have carbon monoxide warning stickers, Sophia's Law is the first in the country to require carbon monoxide detection *devices* by law. Marine CO detectors must be listed for marine use – not just any CO detector is permitted.

According to the Minnesota DNR:

- The carbon monoxide warning stickers are only required for gasoline powered motorboats. Three are required – at the helm, at the entrance to an enclosed occupancy space, and at the aft boarding/stern area.
- Although not required, it is encouraged to attach the stickers on diesel powered boats and boats with generators or stoves. The helm and stern stickers are recommended on any motorboat. All boaters are encouraged to display CO warning stickers at the steering station and on the stern even if not required by law.

- This law applies to all motorboats regardless of length that have the enclosed spaces. If your motorboat has a three-sided enclosure or you operate with a canvas enclosure, please install a CO detector and warning stickers for the safety of your passengers and yourself.

You might ask, ‘I’m only going to Minnesota for the weekend to fish, does this apply to me?’ The law applies to any motorboat, with the spaces defined above, operating on Minnesota waters. This includes the Minnesota side of border waters and federal waters within the state. A motorboat includes sailboats with motors.



‘Sophia’s Law’

This new law, known as Sophia’s Law, is named for a 7-year-old girl who tragically lost her life to carbon monoxide poisoning while boating on Lake Minnetonka in 2015. The family set out to enjoy a rare 80-degree October day, but 30 minutes into the trip Sophia complained of a headache and went below deck to rest. Others on the boat began feeling nauseous as well. When Sophia’s father checked on her—a mere 7 minutes after she went into the boat’s cabin—he found her unconscious. Her parents, both physicians, started CPR but were unable to revive her.

It was later determined that a leak in the boat’s exhaust system was the source of the carbon monoxide on board. Because CO has no odor, the cause of Sophia’s symptoms were not recognized until it was too late.

It is the family’s mission to prevent a tragedy like this from occurring again. Sophia’s parents have advocated for Sophia’s Law because they believe earlier detection and awareness to the dangers of CO would have alerted them sooner, possibly saving her life.

https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/education_safety/safety/boatwater/carbon-monoxide.pdf

For more information, visit: <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/safety/boatwater/sophias-law.html>

Remember: If you have a headache, feel fatigued or nauseous while under way, move away from any exhaust source to fresh air!

Obtain a free vessel safety check: https://wow.uscgaux.info/i_want_a_vsc/index.php