

# **Frequently Asked Questions about Personal Watercraft**

Prepared by the Northwest PWC Safety Project  
PWC Industry Association  
NW Marine trade Association

## **How is a PWC different from a regular boat?**

A PWC is actually classified as a Class A power boat by the Coast guard, but there are some important differences between it and traditional boats. PWC are usually smaller than most powerboats and the propulsion system is different. Instead of an exposed propeller, a PWC operates with an inboard engine powering a jet pump. The jet pump allows the PWC to have a very shallow draft and eliminates the risks associated with an exposed prop, either to people or animals in the water or to the environment.

## **How do people use their PWC?**

PWC can carry up to three people, depending on the model, and are used in a wide variety of ways, some play, some work. As we've pointed out, many law enforcement agencies, lifeguards and search and rescue teams use them at work (including Lake Stevens). Private owners use them to water-ski, as tenders on larger boats and for just plain fun on the water.

## **Are PWC noisy?**

There is a state law governing the level of noise allowed by PWC and all craft currently being manufactured meet this level. While operating on the water, PWC run below 75 dB, about the same as a household vacuum.

## **Why are PWC so maneuverable?**

PWC operate with a jet propulsion system and have a very shallow draft, so there is very little drag. They can turn very quickly, maneuver in tight situations and accelerate quickly; this makes them very useful in enforcement and rescue situations. It also makes them fun to drive.

## **Aren't some counties banning PWC?**

Although regulations are already on the books governing these craft, some counties are considering restrictions on PWC operations, mostly on small fresh water lakes. No local agency has initiated a total ban on PWC.

## **How is PWC used in Law Enforcement?**

Nationwide nearly 1,200 PWC are in use in police departments, sheriff's offices, search and rescue units, wildlife conservation agencies and emergency service teams. Safe and reliable, the PWC is used to tow stranded boats, pull in tired swimmers, search for missing persons, inspect out-of-the-way waterways, patrol shallow lakes and rivers, enforce regulations in harbors and at marinas, save stranded surfers and sail boarders, remove dangerous debris and transport paramedics.

## **PWC at Play**

There are about 17,000-registered PWC in Washington and PWC NOW account for 30 percent of all boat units sold. Many PWC owners have formed clubs for camaraderie and recreational events. Clubs provide an opportunity to watch over PWC operators and to speak out in the community. A club can provide opportunities for organized education about PWC and safe use as well as skill development. One such group is the Puget Sound Jet Sports Association and another is Swell Guy Jet Sports Club.