



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
**BOARD OF PILOTAGE COMMISSIONERS**

2901 Third Avenue, Suite 500 | Seattle, Washington 98121 | (206) 515-3904 | [www.pilotage.wa.gov](http://www.pilotage.wa.gov)

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)**  
**Concerning Pilotage Exemptions in Washington State**

**Do I need a pilot or a pilotage exemption in Washington State?**

**DO YOU:**

- have a U.S. flagged vessel of any size – that is operating exclusively on its coastwise, fishery, and/or recreational endorsement?
- have a U.S. or Canadian flagged vessel engaged exclusively in the coastwise trade on the west coast of the Continental United States (including Alaska) and/or British Columbia?
- have a vessel in/outbound to/from Canadian ports which employs a pilot licensed by the Pacific Pilotage Authority (BC Pilots)?



**If any of the above apply, stop. You do NOT need a pilot or a pilotage exemption**

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**DO YOU:**

- have a foreign flagged yacht over 200 FT and/or greater than 1,300 GT (ITC)?



**If yes, you are required by the Pilotage Act, Chapter 88.16 RCW to take a pilot.**

For information on how to schedule a pilot in Puget Sound, please contact Puget Sound Pilots dispatch at 206.448.4455. For information on scheduling a pilot in Grays Harbor, please contact the Port of Grays Harbor at <https://www.portofgraysharbor.com/terminal-tariffs-and-resources>.

## DO YOU:

- have a foreign flagged yacht equal to or less than 200 FT and equal to or less than 1,300 GT (ITC)? or
- have a foreign flagged small passenger vessel that also meets the above size requirements, is manned by U.S. or Canadian-licensed deck and engine officers appropriate to the size of the vessel, and is operated exclusively in the waters of the Puget Sound Pilotage District or lower British Columbia?



**If any apply, you may qualify for an exemption.** To find the application form and additional resources, please visit our website at <https://pilotage.wa.gov/pilotage-exemptions.html>.

### What are Washington State’s pilotage districts?

As provided in the [Revised Code of Washington \(RCW\) Section 88.16.070](#), every vessel in the Puget Sound Pilotage District - all Washington (WA) waters east of 123° 24' W - or the Grays Harbor Pilotage District – the waters of Grays and Willapa Harbors - is subject to compulsory WA pilotage unless exempt. The WA waters of the Columbia River Bar and the Columbia River are subject to the pilotage laws and rules set by the State of Oregon

### What is the process to receive a pilotage exemption?

In general, you will need to provide a completed application, which includes information regarding your vessel and planned transits in Washington’s waters, copies of vessel insurance and registry, vessel captain license and experience, and a photo of the vessel. Additional requirements are found on the exemption application, which can be found on our [website](#).

Once all the documentation has been received and verified by BPC staff, the request for a pilotage exemption will be considered by the Board at the next available public meeting of the BPC. A schedule of BPC meetings can be found [here](#).

### Are chartered yachts eligible for a pilotage exemption?

A foreign-flagged yacht that engages in trade (carrying cargo or passengers for a fee) is not considered a yacht for the purpose of determining eligibility for a Board-approved exemption.

A vessel that is under “bare boat” charter (or any form of charter in which the charterer has complete control of the vessel, e.g. by covering all costs of the vessel including master and crew at the charterer’s expense) is considered a yacht for the purpose of determining eligibility for a Board-approved exemption if it is operated only for recreation/pleasure; does not engage in trade; and meets the tonnage and length requirements

### How long does the pilotage exemption process take?

The Board of Pilotage Commissioners (BPC) recommends that you start the application process as soon as you know that are coming into Washington waters, as exemptions are reviewed and granted at monthly meetings of the BPC, as referenced above. While an 'interim' exemption can be granted by the Chair of the BPC, the BPC **requests you apply at least one month in advance**. It can take several days to gather your documentation to submit a complete application. It is not unusual to see applications received in April or May for vessels coming in late summer.

### What is the duration of the pilotage exemption?

There are two options: a three-month or a one-year pilotage exemption certificate. There is a small fee reduction for vessels that have an annual exemption renewal. However, a new application must be submitted each year.

### What is the cost for an exemption?

The current fees, pursuant to [WAC 363-116-360](#), are listed below:

	<b>3 Months or Less</b>	<b>1 Year or Less</b>	<b>Annual Renewal</b>
<b>A. YACHTS</b>			
Up to and including 50 feet LOA	\$ 50	\$ 50	\$ 50
Up to and including 100 feet LOA	\$ 700	\$ 1,000	\$ 600
Up to and including 200 feet LOA and 750 gt	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,400	\$ 800
Up to and including 200 feet LOA and 751 to 1,300 gt	\$ 1,500	\$ 1,500	\$ 1,500
<b>B. PASSENGER VESSELS</b>			
Up to and including 100 feet LOA	\$ 1,125	\$ 1,500	\$ 1,000
Up to and including 200 feet LOA	\$ 1,500	\$ 1,500	\$ 1,200

### How do I know which criteria in the application applies to my vessel?

Typically, vessel owners or captains will know if they are subject to the requirements. However, for example, an Asian Gypsy Moth Certificate is only given to vessels calling at certain ports in the Asian Pacific during certain times of year.

### What is a COFR?

The COFR is an acronym for a Certificate of Financial Responsibility and is issued by the United States Coast Guard (USCG.) According to the USCG, you must have a COFR if the vessel is over 300 GT using the navigable waters of the United States. Find more information, including how to apply at <https://www.uscg.mil/Mariners/National-Pollution-Funds-Center/cofrs/>.

### What are my options if my pilotage exemption request is not granted by the BPC?

If the Board does not grant you an exemption, you will be required to take a pilot. For information on how to schedule a pilot in Puget Sound, please contact dispatch at 206.448.4455. For information on scheduling a pilot in Grays Harbor, please view their information at <https://www.portofgraysharbor.com/terminal-tariffs-and-resources>

### **My vessel is under 65'. Why am I not exempt from pilotage automatically?**

While many boaters may hear that a small vessel is exempt from pilotage, the Pilotage Act, [Chapter 88.16.070](#) is very clear that any size foreign flagged vessel is subject to compulsory pilotage.

### **What if I already have experience in the waters I plan to transit?**

Under the authority granted in [WAC 363-116-360](#), the BPC may place conditions on your pilotage exemption, typically determined by previous local experience. One example is an "Pilot Orientation". A Pilot Orientation could be as extensive as a one-time cruise or could be as simple as meeting with a pilot to go through specific local landmarks and areas. Our new application packet has more information.

### **What is a "Pilot Orientation"?**

A pilot orientation involves hiring a Puget Sound Pilot to provide a familiarization to the navigational nuances of the Puget sound region. Depending on the vessels planned transits and the Captain's experience, this orientation might be required to happen in Port Angeles upon entering the region or may require a pilot to ride through restricted waters, ie: Ballard Locks, Duwamish River, etc. While the BPC may require an orientation, vessels can always request an orientation from the pilots if needed.

### **What happens if I do not comply with the pilotage exemption rules?**

Under the authority granted to the BPC through [RCW 88.16.150](#), a person in violation of the Pilotage Act may be liable to a maximum civil penalty of ten thousand dollars for each violation. Non-exempt vessels failing to utilize compulsory pilotage service in either the Puget Sound or Grays Harbor Pilotage Districts as required in [RCW 88.16.070\(3\)](#) shall also pay all applicable pilotage charges.

### **Additional Resources**

Coast Guard Navigation and Vessel Inspection Circular(NVIC) 8-94:

<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg5/nvic/pdf/1994/n8-94.pdf>. Vessels exempt from WA pilotage may be required to have or take a federal pilot as provided in the U.S. (federal) laws and regulations.

District 13 Local Notice to Mariners

<https://www.navcen.uscg.gov/?pageName=InmDistrict&region=13>

Pilotage Act, Revised Code of Washington Chapter [88.16.070 RCW Vessels exempted and included under chapter—Fee—Penalty](#).

Pilotage Rules: Washington Administrative Code [WAC 363-116-360 Exempt Vessels](#).

Puget Sound Pilots: <https://www.pspilots.org/>.

Port of Grays Harbor: <https://www.portofgraysharbor.com/>.

Seattle Marine Traffic:

<https://www.marinetraffic.com/en/ais/details/ports/194?name=SEATTLE&country=USA>.

USCG Vessel Traffic Service – Puget Sound: <https://www.pacificarea.uscg.mil/VTSPugetSound/>.

Foreign Flag Familiarization Packet