

Duties of Harbormaster

The Clinton Harbormaster jurisdiction includes all the Clinton shoreline waterways along Long Island Sound, the entire Clinton Harbor, the Indian River, Hammonasset River and Hammock River. Clinton Harbor and rivers has 11 Marinas with over 1,200 total vessels slipped in those marinas and has several commercial and charter fishing vessels based in the harbor as well. State Harbormasters and Deputy Harbormasters have a distinct and essential role for ensuring public safety and managing our waterways in the public interest. Theirs is the job of maintaining an orderly haven where all vessels, including commercial fishing boats, tugs, barges, recreational sail and power boats, ferries and excursion vessels, ocean-going ships, and even small, non-motorized craft such as canoes and kayaks, may coexist in safety and harmony.

There are 39 Governor appointed Harbormasters serving 39 municipalities along the Connecticut shoreline on Long Island Sound and the major rivers that flow into the Sound. Included are diverse areas such as the ports of Bridgeport, New Haven, and New London, recreational and commercial harbors such as Southport, Branford, and Chester, and urban riverfronts at Middletown, Hartford, and Norwich. Harbormasters and Deputy Harbormasters work closely with a number of Federal, State, and local agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), U.S. Coast Guard, Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP) and local police and fire departments.

The powers and duties of the Harbormasters and Deputy Harbormasters are established in the Connecticut General Statutes, including Sections 15-1 through 15-9 and other sections. One important responsibility is keeping navigation channels and established fairways clear of obstructions. Harbormasters and Deputy Harbormasters are also empowered to enforce the provisions of the Connecticut General Statutes concerning removal of abandoned and derelict vessels, including Sec. 15-11a and 15-140c.

The assignment and approval of boat mooring locations and administration of mooring permits is a primary function of the Harbormaster's office. It may also be one of the most difficult, since the demand for mooring locations in State waters has grown over the years while the number of vessels most harbors can accommodate is fairly well fixed. Experience shows it is important to establish that, unlike anchoring, mooring a vessel in State waters is a privilege, not a right.

The Corps is the primary agency for granting Federal approval of mooring locations and has delegated to the Harbormaster approval authority for the installation of individual, noncommercial moorings. Section 15-8 of the Connecticut General Statutes gives the Harbormaster authority to assign mooring locations and require all mooring users to apply for mooring permits.

In summary, Connecticut's Harbormasters and Deputy Harbormasters are dedicated officials who strive to perform their statutory duties for the care and supervision of the State's diverse harbors and waterways in the public interest and with the highest level of professionalism. The Connecticut DEEP provides information and other assistance to the Harbormasters and Deputy Harbormasters and describes some of the basic attributes required for these important positions: a Harbormaster should be familiar with the local area, its people, and its waters; be skilled in the arts of boat and mooring seamanship and be a person who can be relied on to uphold regulations in a fair, even-handed manner with an appreciation of the public trust.