

1 A bill to be entitled
 2 An act relating to divers-down warning devices;
 3 amending s. 327.331, F.S.; revising the definitions of
 4 the terms "divers-down buoy," "divers-down flag," and
 5 "divers-down symbol"; defining the term "divers-down
 6 warning device"; expanding the types of indicators or
 7 devices allowed to be used to signal the presence of
 8 submerged divers; specifying requirements for divers-
 9 down warning devices; amending ss. 327.395 and 327.73,
 10 F.S.; conforming provisions to changes made by the
 11 act; reenacting s. 327.33(1), F.S., relating to
 12 reckless or careless operation of a vessel, to
 13 incorporate the amendment made to s. 327.331, F.S., in
 14 a reference thereto; providing an effective date.

15
 16 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

17
 18 Section 1. Section 327.331, Florida Statutes, is amended
 19 to read:

20 327.331 Divers; definitions; divers-down warning device
 21 ~~flag or buoy~~ required; obstruction to navigation of certain
 22 waters; penalty.-

23 (1) As used in this section:

24 (a) "Diver" means a person who is wholly or partially
 25 submerged in the waters of the state and is equipped with a face
 26 mask and snorkel or underwater breathing apparatus.

27 (b) "Divers-down buoy" means a buoyant device, other than
28 a vessel, which displays a divers-down symbol ~~of at least 12~~
29 ~~inches by 12 inches~~ on three or four flat sides, ~~which is~~
30 ~~prominently visible on the water's surface when in use.~~

31 (c) "Divers-down flag" means a flag that displays a
32 divers-down symbol and ~~that meets the following specifications:~~

33 1. ~~Is~~ The flag must be square or rectangular. ~~If~~
34 ~~rectangular,~~ the length must not be less than the height, or
35 ~~more than 25 percent longer than the height. The flag must have~~
36 ~~a wire or other stiffener to hold it fully unfurled and extended~~
37 ~~in the absence of a wind or breeze.~~

38 2. ~~The flag must consist of~~ and has a divers-down symbol
39 on each face. ~~side~~

40 2. Has with a white diagonal stripes on each face which
41 begin stripe that begins at the top, staff-side of the flag and
42 extend extends diagonally to the lower opposite corner.

43 3. If rectangular, is of a length that is not less than
44 the height or more than 25 percent longer than the height.

45 4. Has a wire, or other stiffener, or is otherwise
46 constructed to ensure that it remains fully unfurled and
47 extended in the absence of a wind or breeze.

48 3. ~~The minimum size for any divers-down flag displayed on~~
49 ~~a buoy or float towed by the diver is 12 inches by 12 inches.~~
50 ~~The minimum size for any divers-down flag displayed from a~~
51 ~~vessel or structure is 20 inches by 24 inches.~~

52 4. ~~Any divers-down flag displayed from a vessel must be~~

53 ~~displayed from the highest point of the vessel or such other~~
54 ~~location which provides that the visibility of the divers-down~~
55 ~~flag is not obstructed in any direction.~~

56 (d) "Divers-down symbol" means a rectangular or square red
57 symbol with a white diagonal stripe. If rectangular, the length
58 may ~~must~~ not be less than the height or more than 25 percent
59 longer than the height. The width of the stripe must be 25
60 percent of the height of the symbol and the stripes must be
61 oriented in the same direction if multiple stripes are
62 displayed.

63 (e) "Divers-down warning device" means a divers-down flag,
64 buoy, or other similar warning device that:

65 1. Contains a divers-down symbol that is at least 12
66 inches by 12 inches in dimension when displayed from the water
67 or at least 20 by 24 inches in dimension when displayed from a
68 vessel; and

69 2. Is designed for, and used by, divers and dive vessels
70 as a means to notify nearby boaters of the presence of a diver
71 in the waters of the immediate area.

72 (f) ~~(e)~~ "Underwater breathing apparatus" means any
73 apparatus, whether self-contained or connected to a distant
74 source of air or other gas, whereby a person wholly or partially
75 submerged in water is enabled to obtain or reuse air or any
76 other gas or gases for breathing without returning to the
77 surface of the water.

78 (2) All divers must prominently display a divers-down

79 warning device ~~flag or buoy~~ in the area in which the diving
80 occurs, other than when diving in an area customarily used for
81 swimming only. A divers-down buoy may not be used or displayed
82 onboard a vessel.

83 (3) A diver or group of divers may not display one or more
84 divers-down warning devices ~~flags or buoys~~ on a river, inlet, or
85 navigation channel, except in case of emergency, in a manner
86 that ~~which shall~~ unreasonably constitutes ~~constitute~~ a
87 navigational hazard.

88 (4) Divers shall make reasonable efforts to stay within
89 100 feet of a divers-down warning device ~~flag or buoy~~ on rivers,
90 inlets, and navigation channels. A person operating a vessel on
91 a river, inlet, or navigation channel must make a reasonable
92 effort to maintain a distance of at least 100 feet from any
93 divers-down warning device ~~flag or buoy~~.

94 (5) Divers must make reasonable efforts to stay within 300
95 feet of a divers-down warning device ~~flag or buoy~~ on all waters
96 other than rivers, inlets, and navigation channels. A person
97 operating a vessel on waters other than a river, inlet, or
98 navigation channel must make a reasonable effort to maintain a
99 distance of at least 300 feet from any divers-down warning
100 device ~~flag or buoy~~.

101 (6) A vessel other than a law-enforcement ~~law-enforcement~~
102 or rescue vessel that approaches within 100 feet of a divers-
103 down warning device ~~flag or buoy~~ on a river, inlet, or
104 navigation channel, or within 300 feet of a divers-down warning

105 device ~~flag or buoy~~ on waters other than a river, inlet, or
 106 navigation channel, must proceed no faster than idle speed, no
 107 wake ~~is necessary to maintain headway and steerageway.~~

108 (7) A divers-down warning device ~~flag or buoy~~ may not be
 109 displayed once all divers are aboard or ashore. A person may not
 110 operate any vessel displaying a divers-down warning device ~~flag~~
 111 unless the vessel has one or more divers in the water.

112 (8) A divers-down warning device must be prominently
 113 visible when in use. A divers-down warning device displayed from
 114 a vessel must be displayed from the highest point of the vessel
 115 or another location that ensures the visibility of the divers-
 116 down device is not obstructed in any direction. A divers-down
 117 buoy must be prominently displayed on the water's surface when
 118 in use.

119 (9)~~(8)~~ Except as provided in s. 327.33, a violation of
 120 this section is a noncriminal infraction punishable as provided
 121 in s. 327.73.

122 Section 2. Subsection (3) of section 327.395, Florida
 123 Statutes, is amended to read:

124 327.395 Boating safety identification cards.—

125 (3) Any commission-approved boater education or boater
 126 safety course, course-equivalency examination developed or
 127 approved by the commission, or temporary certificate examination
 128 developed or approved by the commission must include a component
 129 regarding diving vessels, awareness of divers in the water,
 130 divers-down warning devices ~~flags and buoys~~, and the

131 requirements of s. 327.331.

132 Section 3. Paragraph (u) of subsection (1) of section
 133 327.73, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

134 327.73 Noncriminal infractions.—

135 (1) Violations of the following provisions of the vessel
 136 laws of this state are noncriminal infractions:

137 (u) Section 327.331, relating to divers-down warning
 138 devices ~~flags and buoys~~, except for violations meeting the
 139 requirements of s. 327.33.

140

141 Any person cited for a violation of any provision of this
 142 subsection shall be deemed to be charged with a noncriminal
 143 infraction, shall be cited for such an infraction, and shall be
 144 cited to appear before the county court. The civil penalty for
 145 any such infraction is \$50, except as otherwise provided in this
 146 section. Any person who fails to appear or otherwise properly
 147 respond to a uniform boating citation shall, in addition to the
 148 charge relating to the violation of the boating laws of this
 149 state, be charged with the offense of failing to respond to such
 150 citation and, upon conviction, be guilty of a misdemeanor of the
 151 second degree, punishable as provided in s. 775.082 or s.
 152 775.083. A written warning to this effect shall be provided at
 153 the time such uniform boating citation is issued.

154 Section 4. For the purpose of incorporating the amendment
 155 made by this act to section 327.331, Florida Statutes, in a
 156 reference thereto, subsection (1) of section 327.33, Florida

157 Statutes, is reenacted to read:

158 327.33 Reckless or careless operation of vessel.—

159 (1) It is unlawful to operate a vessel in a reckless
160 manner. A person is guilty of reckless operation of a vessel who
161 operates any vessel, or manipulates any water skis, aquaplane,
162 or similar device, in willful or wanton disregard for the safety
163 of persons or property at a speed or in a manner as to endanger,
164 or likely to endanger, life or limb, or damage the property of,
165 or injure any person. Reckless operation of a vessel includes,
166 but is not limited to, a violation of s. 327.331(6). Any person
167 who violates a provision of this subsection commits a
168 misdemeanor of the first degree, punishable as provided in s.
169 775.082 or s. 775.083.

170 Section 5. This act shall take effect July 1, 2016.