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STATE OF NEW JERSEY  
1-609-292-6500 ext. 5069

## Instructions to Implement the Abandoned Vessel Disposition Law

**\*\* Please note that each case is unique and additional documents may be required upon request.\*\***

### **Purpose and Authority:**

These instructions implement the Abandoned Vessel Disposition Law (N.J.S.A. 12:7C-7 et seq.) which provides property owners with a mechanism for legal acquisition and disposition of vessels abandoned upon their property; however, this is not a substitute for the settlement of disputes between the property owner and vessel owner.

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### **Provisions:**

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 12:7C-9, it is unlawful for any owner to abandon any vessel to or upon public land or waters of this State, including any municipal waterway, to or upon any municipally-owned land, or upon any private property, or the water immediately adjacent thereto without the consent of the official designated by law to have jurisdiction over such public land or waterway, or the owner or other person in charge of the private property except when an emergency exists.

A vessel which has remained moored, grounded, docked, or otherwise attached or fastened to or upon any public land or waterway or any private property without such consent for a period of more than 30 days, or which is submerged partially or completely into the water for a period of time, shall be deemed abandoned and may be impounded if an official authorized by statute or ordinance to enforce regulations related to municipal waterways or a law enforcement officer having enforcement authority has reason to believe that the vessel has been abandoned.

The vessel may be removed from a municipal waterway by, or at the direction of, the municipality or harbor commission and may be impounded and removed to a storage space, and its registration plates seized.

The owner shall be responsible for the cost of the removal, transportation, storage or disposal, and any other incidental costs associated with the impounded vessel.

Whenever a vessel is removed, the official designated by law to have jurisdiction over the municipal waterway shall file an incident report with the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission (MVC).

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 12:7C-10, if the owner of the vessel fails to claim the impounded vessel and pay the reasonable costs of removal and storage by midnight of the 30<sup>th</sup> day following impoundment, it shall be prima facie evidence of abandonment and shall establish a rebuttable presumption that the vehicle is abandoned. A landowner, his lessee, or his agent or a municipality or harbor commission, in the case of a municipal waterway, may institute proceedings to acquire title to any abandoned vessel on his land or the water immediately adjacent thereto in the case of a landowner, his lessee, or his agent, or which has become abandoned in a municipal waterway, in the case of a municipality or harbor commission. The acquisition of title divests any other person and any other legal entity, including lienholders, of any interest in the vessel.

At any time prior to the final acquisition of title by the landowner, his lessee, his agent, or a municipality or harbor commission, the owner or a lessor or holder of a lien on the vessel may reclaim possession of it upon payment of the reasonable costs of removal and storage of the vessel and any outstanding penalties and court costs assessed against him; provided, however, that if it is a lessor or the holder of a lien who is reclaiming the vessel, he may reclaim the vessel without payment for the storage but shall pay the costs of removal. In such cases, the owner of the vessel shall be liable for all outstanding costs, fines and penalties, and the municipality shall have a lien against the property and income of that violator for the total amount of those outstanding costs, fines, and penalties if the vessel has been abandoned in a municipal waterway or on municipally-owned land.

## Procedure and Requirements to Acquire Title:

**If the abandoned vessel has a New Jersey boat registration number**, the applicant must furnish a "Vehicle Registration Application Request" Form DO-11A along with a \$15.00 check or money order made payable to "NJMVC" (no cash). Mail documents to the following address: NJ Motor Vehicle Commission (MVC), Data Output, 225 E. State Street, Trenton, NJ, 08666.

Upon receipt of registration information from the MVC, the applicant must determine whether the vessel was used for commercial or non-commercial purposes.

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**If the Registration Code (Reg Code) on the Registration Application is a Code 81** the vessel was used for *non-commercial purposes*. In this case, the applicant must contact the County Recording Officer of the county in which the registered owner resides and request a certificate of search pertaining to lienholders on the vessel. The applicant shall comply with the procedures and fees of the County Officer. Note: Some counties may require the applicant to utilize title search companies.

**If the Registration Code (Reg Code) on the Registration Application is anything other than Code 81**, the vessel was used for *commercial purposes*. In this case, the applicant must contact the Secretary of State, Division of Commercial Recording, P.O. Box 303, Trenton, NJ, 08625 and request the Secretary of State to supply him/her with a certificate of search pertaining to lienholders on the vessel.

**If the abandoned vessel has a boat registration number from a state other than New Jersey or does not have a boat registration number** or other obvious owner identification (e.g. papers, identification documents aboard, etc.), a search must be made for a vessel documentation number on the main beam of the vessel. If a number is found, the applicant must contact the U.S. Coast Guard, National Vessel Documentation Center, 2039 Stonewall Jackson Drive, Falling Waters, West Virginia, 25419, and request that the Coast Guard furnish him/her with the name(s) and address of the owner and lienholder, if any.

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The applicant must also request a lien search with the New Jersey MVC. Lien Search Application (DO-22) with a \$15 check or money order payable to "NJ MVC" is required to be submitted. If there is no record in New Jersey, we will perform an additional search, and if a record is found you will be notified. If no records are found, a certified search from the Motor Vehicle Authority of New York, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and Maryland will be required. Submit your lien search request with one of the documents listed in step 3.

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**If the vessel was abandoned on private property**, a notarized statement is required stating how and when you came into possession of the vessel. The statement must contain a complete description of the vessel, the applicant's name and address, the current date, and the applicant's signature.

**If the vessel was abandoned at a marina** and the marina owner entered into a storage contract with the vessel owner, a copy of the contract(s) is/are required if in existence. In cases where the marina owner has made repairs to the vessel, a copy of the repair bill(s) is/are required.

**Do Not Continue** until you receive a response regarding steps 1 & 2. For assistance, call the telephone number listed on Page 1 of this procedure.

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Upon receiving the certificate of search, the applicant must notify the vessel owner and any secured party or assignee thereof by mailing "Abandoned Vessel Notice" Form OS/SS-64. The notice must be sent United States Postal Service Certified Mail, Return Receipt requested. If the registered owner responds that the vehicle was sold or transferred to another person, the applicant shall then redirect the notice to the new owner. If no owner can be identified, or no secured party appears on the records of the Secretary of State, County Recording Officer, Motor Vehicle Commission, or the U.S. Coast Guard, the "Abandoned Vessel Notice" Form OS/SS-64 does not need to be sent. A copy of this notice and the signed return receipts are required to be submitted to this office. If returned undeliverable, the original, unopened envelope is required.

## Procedure and Requirements to Acquire Title: *(continued)*

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At the same time as step 4, the applicant must place a notice in a newspaper that is published and circulated within the county and/or municipality where the vessel is located. The newspaper advertisement must describe the vessel by year, make, location of abandonment, and any identifying numbers (Hull Identification Number-HIN and/or Registration Number). Publication must also state that if the vessel is not claimed and removed within 30-days after the publication date, the applicant will apply for title in the applicant's name in accordance with the Abandoned Vessel Disposition Law, N.J.S.A. 12:7C-7 et seq. An affidavit of newspaper publication is required to be submitted to this office. Copies must be certified.

**Note:** The newspaper publication and letter (steps 4 & 5) shall not contain any statements conditioning the release of the vessel upon the payment of overdue repairs or storage costs with respect to the vessel.

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If the vessel is not claimed and removed within 30 days after the publication date of the notice, the person, entity, municipality, or harbor commission desiring to acquire title shall apply to the MVC for transfer of title to the vessel.

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The applicant may apply to the MVC for title to the vessel in his name by submitting a completed and notarized "Application for Title to an Abandoned Vessel" Form OS/SS-65 and a \$60.00 check or money order (no cash) made payable to: NJMVC. You may mail documents to the below address. Note: No title shall be issued if there is any dispute between the applicant and the owner of the vessel.

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After review of your documents, the MVC may find it necessary for the vessel to have the Hull Identification Number (HIN) inspected by the NJ Marine State Police. If a HIN inspection is required, you will be contacted prior to issuance of the Certificate of Ownership. You must have the ISM/SS-10A completed by the Marine State Police.

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After review and approval of all required documents, the MVC may issue the applicant title to the vessel in the form of a Certificate of Ownership. The acquisition of title to the vessel by the applicant divests any other person of any interest in the vessel.

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***After making copies for your records,  
mail required documents to:***

NJ Motor Vehicle Commission  
Special Title/Abandoned Unit  
225 East State Street  
P.O. Box 017  
Trenton, New Jersey 08666-0017

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