

SUBJECT: Requiring motorboat operators to use emergency engine cutoff switches

COMMITTEE: Culture, Recreation and Tourism — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — Cyrier, Martinez, Bucy, Gervin-Hawkins, Holland, Kacal,
Morrison, Toth

0 nays

1 absent — Jarvis Johnson

WITNESSES: For — James Gorzell; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Quint Balkcom,
Game Warden Peace Officer's Association; J. McCartt, Kalkomey
Enterprises; Kirby Gorzell)

Against — None

On — Cody Jones, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

DIGEST: HB 337 would require the operator of a motorboat less than 26 feet in length and equipped by the manufacturer with an engine cutoff switch to verify that the cutoff switch was functioning properly and attached to the operator or each individual on the boat, depending on the type of switch. Operating a motorboat of this size and equipped with a cutoff switch without first doing so would be prohibited.

The bill would define an engine cutoff switch as an emergency switch designed to shut off the engine of a motorboat if activated by the operator or passenger falling overboard or moving beyond the length of the lanyard. If the switch was operated using a lanyard attachment, the lanyard would be required to be attached to the boat operator's body, clothing, or personal flotation device. If the switch was operated by a wireless attachment, an operational man-overboard transmitter would be required to be properly attached to each individual on the motorboat.

This bill would take effect September 1, 2019.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

This bill would require motorboat operators and passengers to use safety equipment already installed on their boats, improving boater safety and saving lives. When a boater is thrown from a motorboat and the engine is left running, boaters can be seriously injured or killed by the motor blades. Requiring the use of a cutoff switch would help prevent these kinds of accidents from occurring.

The bill would only require the use of engine shutoff switches that were installed on boats by the boats' manufacturers. Boaters would not be required to retrofit boats with shutoff switches. Texas already requires any operator of a personal watercraft, such as a jet ski, to use an installed emergency cutoff switch. This bill would extend the same precaution to the operators and passengers of motorboats under 26 feet, saving lives without creating an excessive burden on boaters.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

HB 337 would create excessive regulations for the operation of motorboats and the testing and use of safety equipment. Boat operators and passengers should be allowed to use their own assessments of risks to make decisions regarding their safety.