USCG Application for Private Aids to Navigation

The purpose for the United States Coast Guard Application for Private Aids to Navigation is to allow the general public the ability to place their own aids to maritime navigation without restricting the use of federally applied navigation. This application is only applicable in federally recognized navigable waters of the U.S. and when operating in non-navigable waters of the U.S. the application is not necessary. This application is only for privately owned aids, and does not apply to any aids operated by the federal government. Examples of aids that might be privately owned are: lighted structures, day beacons, lighted and unlighted buoys, and fog signals. These Private Aids to Navigation are also known as PATONs. The application and regulation can be found in the Code of Federal Regulation 33 CFR Part 66.

PATONs include all items listed above, but they exclude non-commercial, single boat mooring buoys, swim buoys, no wake buoys, and racecourse buoys. These specific items have a minimal adverse effect on maritime navigation and are informational. Aids that have minimal adverse effect on navigation and that display all appropriate markings, and are informational are most often excluded from this application.

The application process is precise and is intended for anyone establishing, discontinuing, or transferring ownership of a PATON. The application must be submitted to the Commander of the Coast Guard District in the location the aid is to be used. The form includes all information that needs to be included. The proposed position for the PATON by two or more horizontal angles and an attached section of chart or sketch showing the proposed section. The name and address of the person who will pay to maintain the aid and the person who will maintain, and the time and dates when the aid is proposed to be in use will also need to be included in the application. The application needs to confirm the necessity of the aid. For lights, the application needs to record the color, characteristic, range, intensity, height above water, and description. For sound signals: the type and characteristic. For buoys or day beacons: shape, color, number, depth of water or height of water needs to be included in the application.

The application is administered by the United States Coast Guard, and there is no cost to apply. It is required for any installation of fixed structures or floating objects that are in navigable waters of the US. The expected average wait time for approval of the application is three months and the permit is valid forever unless there is a change in ownership, dock location, or removal of the PATON.

The approval of the application is always from the Commandant of the United States Coast Guard in the district which your PATON is located. They must be notified and approve the application before placement of the PATON. In cases where fixed structures are altered or placed in navigable waters of the United States, the US Army Corps of Engineers, district engineer must be notified and also approve the PATON as well as approval from the Coast Guard.

Existing structures have exemptions in the application because nothing in the application should be constructed to interfere or nullify the requirements of existing laws or regulations. Nothing should be interfering with markings of structures, obstructions that are sunken in the water and subject to US jurisdiction, markings of artificial islands, lighting of bridges over water, and structures that are erected on or over the seabed and subsoil of the Outer Continental Shelf. All these structures need to be maintained and cannot have PATONs interfering with the use.

Protection of PATONs is offered through the US Coast Guard, which means that once the application has been approved and the aid has been placed, it is lawfully maintained by the Coast Guard. With the proper report and evidence of any interference and obstructions, penalties will be made the appropriate party by the US Coast Guard.

This application is a straightforward permit for Private Aids to Navigation in federally recognized navigable waters of the US. It is open to the public with few exceptions and approved by the Commandant of the US Coast Guard. There is no cost for application, but the aid must be properly installed by the applicant and maintained periodically.