Florida’s Coral Reef Protection Act went into effect on July 1, 2009. The law increases protection of Florida’s endangered coral reefs by raising awareness of the damages associated with vessel groundings and anchoring on coral reefs. The law affects all vessels (commercial and recreational) that transit state waters within Monroe, Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, and Martin counties, and holds those that injure reefs responsible for causing damage to, or destruction of, coral reefs.

Where can I get more information about Florida’s coral reefs and the Coral Reef Protection Act?

To learn more, please visit:
www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/programs/coral/
and www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/programs/coral/ripr.htm

Photos provided by: Lad Atkins, Harry Booth, Joe Marino, Jennifer Podis, Rebecca Ross, and FDEP.
Why is the Florida Reef Tract important, and how does the Coral Reef Protection Act help protect it?

- The Florida Reef Tract provides habitat for over 6,000 marine species, protects South Florida’s shorelines from tropical storms and hurricanes, and sustains Florida’s beaches, tourism, and recreation.
- Coral reef development can only happen when the Continental Shelf is the only barrier reef in the continental United States.
- South Florida’s reefs are worth $6.3 billion to the local economy and support more than 70,000 jobs annually.
- Coral reef development can only happen when certain factors such as water temperature, nutrients, and wave action are all present in the right conditions. South Florida is the only region in the continental United States where those conditions support coral reef development.
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What do vessel groundings and anchoring impacts have on Florida’s coral reefs?

- Vessel grounding and anchoring incidents can cause significant damage to reef habitats, potentially changing their biological composition and as a result, the environmental health of coral reefs.
- Although the damage caused to a reef by anchoring a single recreational boat may be small in comparison to the damage caused by a large commercial vessel grounding, the cumulative damages resulting from anchoring and other recreational boating impacts may be greater due to the sheer numbers of recreational boat users in Florida.

What civil penalties are prescribed by the Coral Reef Protection Act?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Damage to a Coral Reef</th>
<th>Penalty</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small (up to 1 m²)</td>
<td>$150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (1 to 10 m²)</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large (more than 10 m²)</td>
<td>$250,000</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

For a violation, the total penalty may be doubled. For a third violation, the penalty may be tripled. For a fourth violation, the penalty may be quadrupled. The total of penalties levied may not exceed $250,000 per occurrence.

What does the Coral Reef Protection Act require from the responsible party?

- The Owner, Operator, Manager, or Insurer of any vessel that causes damage to the reef must notify FDEP within 24 hours of damaging or otherwise impacting a coral reef.
- The Owner, Operator, Manager, or Insurer of any vessel that causes damage to the reef must consult with FDEP in accomplishing this task.
- The Owner, Operator, Manager, or Insurer of any vessel that causes damage to the reef must cooperate with FDEP to undertake damage assessment and primary restoration of the injured coral reef in a timely fashion. Assessment and restoration efforts must be conducted by qualified, authorized individuals.
- The Owner, Operator, Manager, or Insurer of any vessel that causes damage to the reef must remove, or cause the removal of, a grounded or anchored vessel in a manner that avoids further damage to the reef and consult with FDEP in accomplishing this task.
- The Owner, Operator, Manager, or Insurer of any vessel that causes damage to the reef must cooperate with FDEP to undertake damage assessment and primary restoration of the injured coral reef in a timely fashion. Assessment and restoration efforts must be conducted by qualified, authorized individuals.

What compensation does the Coral Reef Protection Act authorize FDEP to collect from the responsible party who has injured a coral reef?

- FDEP is authorized to collect from the responsible party the cost of natural resource damage assessments and activities undertaken by, or at the request of, the responsible party to minimize or prevent further coral reef injuries, including staff time.
- FDEP is authorized to collect from the responsible party the cost of enforcement actions undertaken by the resource trustees, including court costs, attorney’s fees, and expert witness fees.
- FDEP is authorized to collect from the responsible party the cost of replacing, restoring or acquiring the equivalent of the injured coral reef, including compensation for the value of the lost use and ecological services of the reef, as determined through habitat equivalency analysis.
- FDEP is authorized to collect from the responsible party the cost of monitoring the injured, restored or replaced coral reef for at least 10 years if the injury area is greater than 1 square meter (m²).

What are the local knowledge and holding capabilities of the anchor that are critical to ensure a vessel is anchored in, and will remain in, the sand?

- Nautical charts, GPS navigation programs, dive maps, and local dive shops can all be used to enhance local knowledge, but ultimately, the vessel operator/owner is responsible for preventing violations of the law.

To view the United States Coast Guard’s Federal Requirements and Safety Boating please visit their website at:
- www.uscgboating.org/
- To learn more, please visit:
- www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/programs/coral/
- www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/programs/coral/frp.htm
- www.southeastfloridareefs.net/coral-refer/coral-reef-protection-act/
- Florida’s Coral Reef Protection Act

Florida’s Coral Reef Protection Act

Shattered great star coral (Montastraea cavernosa), resulting from a vessel impact.