
Operators' Licenses
Alcohol Beverage Laws
Fact Sheet 3104

revenue.wi.gov

This fact sheet provides information about operators' licenses and when they are required. An operator's license, often called a "bartender's license," is issued to an individual to serve alcohol beverages at a retail licensed/permited premises.

Qualifications for Obtaining an Operator's License

Applicants for operators' licenses must meet the following qualifications:

- The applicant must be at least 18 years of age when the license is issued. The applicant is not required to be a Wisconsin resident.
- Subject to Wisconsin's Fair Employment Law, ch. 111, Wis. Stats., the applicant must not have been convicted of a felony or be a habitual law offender. Wisconsin's Fair Employment Law prohibits the denial of a license based on a pending arrest or conviction record unless the record substantially relates to the licensing activity.
- The applicant must have successfully completed an approved responsible beverage server training course. A [list of approved courses](#) is available at revenue.wi.gov.

Applicants are not required to complete the training course if they are renewing an existing operator's license, have completed the training course within the last two years, or have held a retail license, manager's license, or operator's license anywhere in Wisconsin within the last two years.

- An application for an operator's license must be made in writing to the municipality where the applicant intends to serve alcohol beverages.
- The applicant must pay any fee established by the municipality for the operator's license, if applicable.

Validity of Operator's Licenses

An operator's license is valid only in the municipality where issued, but it may be used at any premises within that municipality. There is no county or statewide operator's license. However, an operator's license from any municipality may be used on a permitted vessel (boat).

An operator's license may be issued for one or two years, as determined by the governing body of the issuing municipality. Operator's licenses in first class cities (City of Milwaukee) expire on December 31 and on June 30 for all other municipalities.

Required Supervision of Retail Licensed/Permitted Premises

While open for business, a retail licensed/permited premises must have **one** of the following persons present:

- The licensee (if the licensee is an individual)

- If the licensee is an individual, an adult member of the licensee's immediate family who resides in the licensee's household
- If the licensee is a corporation or limited liability company, the agent appointed for the alcohol beverage license or permit
- The holder of a valid provisional operator's license
- The holder of a valid operator's or manager's license

A Class "A" licensed premises is not required to have one of the persons listed above on the premises between 12 midnight and 6 a.m.

Retail licensees/permittees may be prosecuted for not having one of the persons listed above on their premises.

An adult working under the immediate supervision of any of the above does not need an operator's license. Immediate supervision means that the licensed person must be able to watch and supervise each unlicensed person's actions. The licensed person must be in the same room or areas as the unlicensed person, near enough to see and talk to him or her, and able to actually supervise the unlicensed person.

Any Questions?

If you are unable to find an answer to your question about alcohol beverage laws on the department's website, email, write, or call the department.

Visit our website: revenue.wi.gov
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