The COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
BOARD OF UNDERWATER ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900, Boston, MA 02114
Web Site: https://www.mass.gov/orgs/board-of-underwater-archaeological-resources Tel.: (617) 845-7961

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON ISOLATED FINDS AND DISCOVERING ARTIFACTS IN MASSACHUSETTS WATERS

Did you know?

Artifacts recovered from state lands (uplands and wetlands) and all submerged bottom lands are state property. It is a violation of state law to surface collect or excavate on state lands or submerged bottoms lands without having proper authorization. The only exceptions are for the surface collection of Isolated Finds from state submerged bottom lands (also referred to as bottomlands, submerged lands, or lands under water, including intertidal) and at Exempted Sites. However, anyone who collects an Isolated Find must report these recoveries to the Board of Underwater Archaeological Resources (BUAR). The List of Exempted Sites is available from BUAR and on BUAR's website.

What is an Isolated Find?

An Isolated Find is an artifact displaced from its original archaeological context through erosions, water currents, or other natural processes, or the result of random human deposition. Determining if an artifact is an Isolated Find rest exclusively with the BUAR.

What is an Underwater Archaeological Resource or Site?

Any of the following having historical value and located within the inland, intertidal or coastal waters of the Commonwealth or the lands under such waters can be considered an underwater archaeological resource or site: abandoned properties, artifacts, treasure troves, sunken ships, or other sites, deemed to possess historical value by BUAR. Archaeological sites include artifacts associated with sunken or abandoned watercraft or aircraft, submerged docks, bridges, and other structures, or artifacts contained in buried sites representing human activities. The collecting of Isolated Finds is not allowed from archaeological sites or within Underwater Archaeological Preserves.

Can I collect artifacts from Public Lands?

Ownership of archaeological sites and artifacts located on public dry and all submerged lands is vested in the Commonwealth. No one may collect artifacts from public lands without first obtaining an appropriate permit. On submerged lands in state waters, the permitting authority vests in BUAR.

Can I collect artifacts from Massachusetts's waters?

Artifacts found in and recovered from Massachusetts's waters are state property. No one may remove, damage, displace or destroy any underwater archaeological resource, including artifacts, without a permit from BUAR. The only exceptions, not requiring a permit, are collecting from an Exempted Site or Isolated Finds. Diving for artifacts is not allowed within Underwater Archaeological Preserves.

How can I keep artifacts I find in Massachusetts's waters?

There are only three legal methods by which you can keep artifacts found in Massachusetts' waters - under a proper permit, if they were recovered from an Exempted Site, or by filing an Isolated Find Form.

When am I breaking the law?

When you surface collect or excavate an archaeological site on state lands without having proper authorization. When you collect an Isolated Find from state bottomlands and do not report it to the Board through an Isolated Find Form.

What are my responsibilities?

In the event you collect an Isolated Find from state bottomlands, you must report it to the Board through an Isolated Find Form.

Where do I get Isolated Find Forms and More Information?

It is very simple. You can contact BUAR:

- through the Board's web site at https://www.mass.gov/orgs/board-of-underwater-archaeological-resources,
- or by emailing David Robinson, Director, david.s.robinson@mass.gov, or calling (617-845-7961),
- or by writing - Board of Underwater Archaeological Resources, 100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900, Boston, MA 02114.