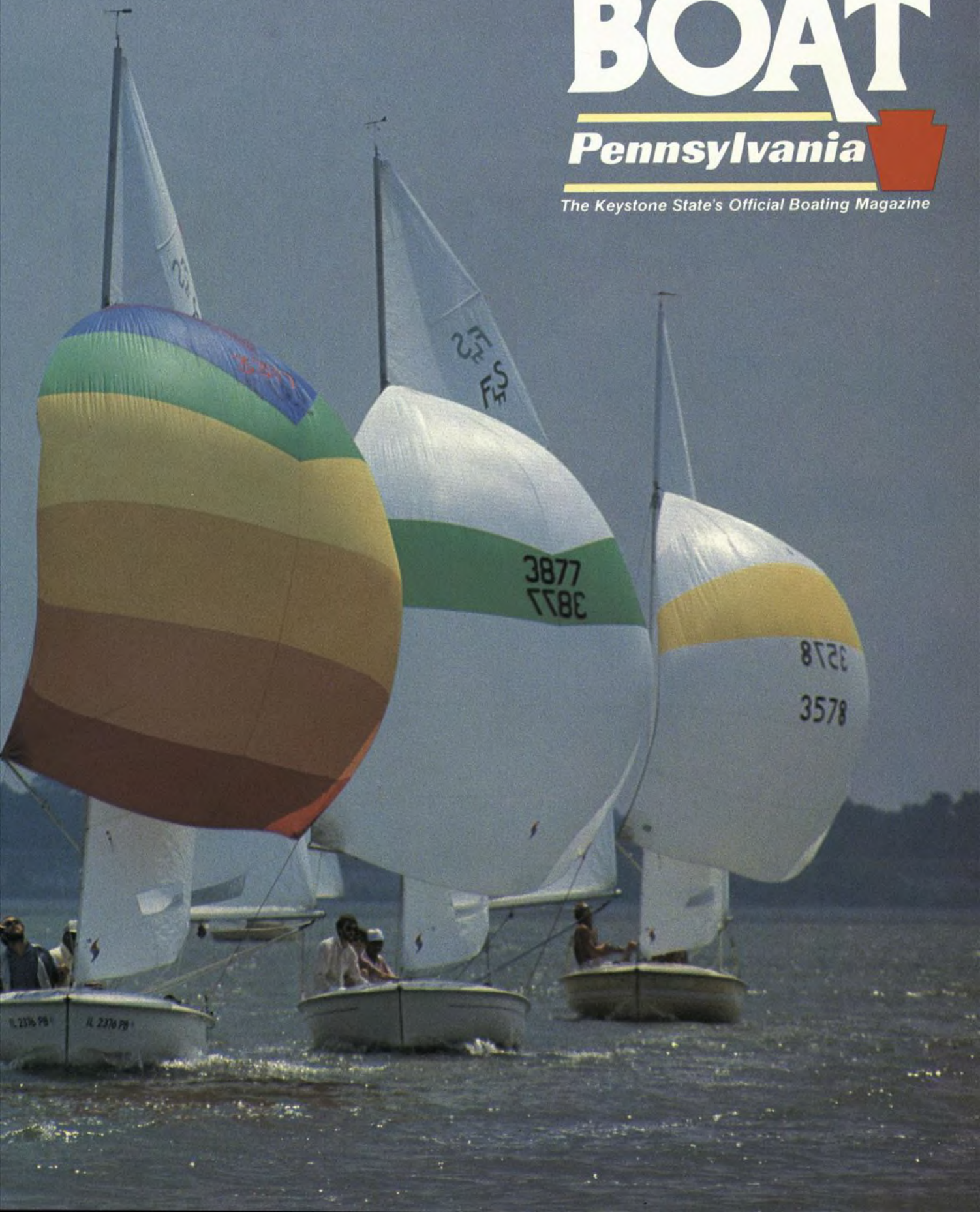


Summer 1990  
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# BOAT

**Pennsylvania** 

The Keystone State's Official Boating Magazine



# Viewpoint

## Wearing a PFD

The Commission has stressed the importance of wearing a personal flotation device as the first line of defense against drowning. This recommendation has been made as a result of the analysis of Pennsylvania fatal boating accidents. Statistics have shown over the years that if you want to drown, you should go out on cold water in a small boat with a couple of beers and no life jacket.

We have emphasized that wearing a PFD can save your life, but we have not suggested that it should be made a requirement except in special cases where the danger is real and obvious. It has been and will continue to be our belief that regulations should protect people's lives and their property without unduly restricting their rights to make personal choices. Regulations such as slow, no-wake restrictions, horsepower limitations, rules of the road, and operating-under-the-influence restrictions are designed not so much for personal protection as for the protection of others who are also using the water.

Other regulations are designed to assure the boat operator that his boat is safe. Examples include construction standards and requirements for capacity plates, visual distress signals and PFD carriage.

Education should be the primary tool for the protection of people from their own foolhardiness. Exception must be made for regulations to cover people who continue to disobey the rules of common sense, despite all of our warnings and attempts to reach them.

Prime examples of these types of regulations are requirements to wear PFDs while operating personal watercraft and sailboards. Persons operating these devices know they will end up in the water at some time or another, and even though most of these boaters already wear their devices, there was a hard corps of "it-won't-happen-to-me" types who refused to wear PFDs voluntarily. A regulation was needed for these people.

The Fish Commission and the Bureau of State Parks have for a number of years mandated that all children under the age of nine wear a PFD. Everyone agreed that this regulation was a good idea. It instills in the child a sense of safety that will hopefully carry on to adulthood.

But what was the basis for this regulation? Were children drowning in boating accidents? The answer is no. The regulation gave parents a hammer with which to threaten their children. Some parents were having trouble convincing their children to wear a bulky horsecollar device that was commonly available at the time. "The police are going to arrest you if you don't have your life jacket on," they'd say. It worked.

The Pittsburgh District U. S. Army Corps of Engineers recently took the process of protecting the individual from himself one step further. Last June, the Corps made it illegal to operate a boat less than 16 feet in length or any canoe unless all persons on board wear a PFD. The Corps established this regulation in response to a number of recent accidents involving this type of craft on Corps impoundments.

Will this action save lives? Probably, but at what price? Was this action necessary? In the Corps' estimation it was because it addresses a perceived need to protect the people who use their facilities. Could it have been avoided? Definitely.

If boaters had worn their PFDs voluntarily in situations where there was an obviously dangerous situation, that is, cold weather, rough water, and small boats on big waters, then the number of fatalities would have diminished dramatically. Last year 13 persons lost their lives in boating accidents in Pennsylvania. Eleven probably could have been saved had they worn their life jackets.

Don't become a statistic and don't become the reason for more boating regulations. Wear your life jacket when it is comfortable and especially when it is needed. Don't push the limits, and don't think that it can't happen to you.



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# BOAT

## Pennsylvania

The Keystone State's Official Boating Magazine

Summer 1990 Vol.7 No.3

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### **The covers**

This issue's wraparound front and back cover was photographed by Ed Eubanks. The time is here for free-spirited summer boating, so get out and enjoy! The articles in this issue can help you savor your sport even more. Paddlers will want to check out the story on page 4, and if you're a water skier, please turn to page 12. Do you own a runabout? See pages 16 and 20 for practical ideas, and if you boat in western Pennsylvania, the information on page 26 may interest you. Sailors can find a gold mine of opportunity in the story on page 29, and personal watercraft owners should check out page 10.