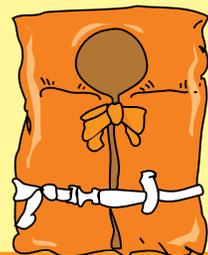


TYPES OF PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICES



Type I

Off-Shore Life Jacket. Designed to turn an unconscious person in the water to a vertical or slightly reclining position, they have over 20 pounds of buoyancy. These are the best PFDs to keep you afloat in large and rough waters where rescue may be slow in coming. They are most commonly found on commercial crafts.



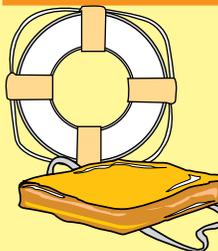
Type II

Near-Shore Buoyant Vest. Designed to turn an unconscious person to a vertical or slightly reclining position, they are less bulky than a Type I. They have a minimum buoyancy of 15.5 pounds and are for calm, inland water where there is a chance of a fast rescue.



Type III

Flotation Aid. These are generally considered the most comfortable PFDs. There are many sizes and styles for different boating activities. Except for the Type III inflatable life jacket, most are not designed to turn an unconscious person face-up and have a minimum buoyancy of 15.5 pounds.



Type IV

Throwable Device. These are designed to be thrown to someone in the water. They include boat cushions, ring and horseshoe buoys. Do not wear them on the back; they are designed to be grasped to the chest, not worn. Keep these immediately available for emergencies.



Type V

Special-Use Device. These are wearable devices approved only for certain activities. The label shows its approved uses and limitations. Varieties include work vests, board sailing vests and white water vests.

WHAT IS A PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICE?

A personal flotation device (PFD) is a life jacket, life preserver or life vest. Whatever you call it, it can save your life—if you wear it! A life jacket is designed to hold your head above water so you can breathe. In either case, **“It won’t work if you don’t wear it!”** The decision **NOT** to wear a life jacket may be the worst, and last, decision you ever make.

KNOW THE LAW ABOUT LIFE JACKETS

- All boats must have a U.S. Coast Guard approved wearable (Type I, II, III or V) PFD on board for each person.

- In addition to wearable PFDs, boats 16 feet and over must have a throwable device (Type IV) on board. Canoes and kayaks, regardless of length, are not required to carry a throwable device. A throwable device cannot be used as a substitute for a wearable device. Type IV throwable devices are not designed to be worn. They are thrown to a victim in the water who grasps it. They must be “immediately available” (within arm’s reach) to the operator and all passengers.

- Type V life jackets must be used in accordance to the requirements on their labels.

- All life jackets must be in good and serviceable condition (no rips in the material, no belts or buckles missing, etc.), and the label’s U.S. Coast Guard approval number must be legible.

- Wearable life jackets must be “readily accessible” (easily reached and ready to wear) and the right size for the person wearing it.

Tip: Try swimming in your life jacket in a warm-water setting. This lets you adjust it for a proper fit and helps you decide if it’s really the right one for you. This also helps prepare you for an actual emergency.

WHO MUST WEAR A LIFE JACKET?

- **All children 12 years of age and younger** on all Commonwealth waters must wear a life jacket while underway on any boat 20 feet in length or less and on all canoes and kayaks. “Underway” includes drifting boats.

- **Anyone towed behind a boat**, no matter what the activity and regardless of age, must wear a life jacket.

- **All personal watercraft operators and passengers.**

- **All sailboarders** (wind-surfers).

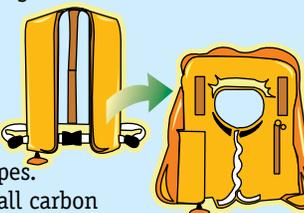
- **Everyone (regardless of age) boating on U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Pittsburgh District lakes,**

in boats less than 16 feet in length and on all canoes and kayaks.

Safety Note: A Type III life jacket with an impact rating of 50 m.p.h. or more is recommended as the safest and most comfortable type to wear in high-speed boating activities. Other bulkier, less streamlined types of life jackets are not designed for high-speed boating activities and could even cause bodily harm.



INFLATABLE LIFE JACKETS



There are two types.

Both types use a small carbon dioxide (CO²) cylinder to inflate an air bladder. Both types have a backup oral inflation tube, better buoyancy than standard PFDs, and the ability to turn an unconscious person face-up in the water. Available varieties include “suspender” types, fishing vests, belt pack vests and even float coats and deck suits. They can be classified as Type III or V PFDs.

- 1. Manually activated**—requires the user to pull a “rip cord” mechanism to puncture the CO² cartridge, allowing it to inflate. These **MUST BE WORN** at all times, or you must keep another standard-type wearable device on board to comply with the life jacket laws.

- 2. Automatically activated**—inflates when a water-soluble material dissolves and releases a spring-trigger plunger, which punctures the CO² cartridge, allowing it to inflate. These **MUST BE WORN** at all times, or you must keep another standard-type wearable device on board to comply with the life jacket laws.

Inflatable life jackets are more comfortable to wear and less bulky than traditional models, but they are also more easily damaged. Frequently check for a faulty or inaccessible inflation mechanism, functional CO₂ cartridge, tears, broken buckles and missing straps. **They are NOT approved for anyone towed behind a boat, on board a personal watercraft (JetSki®, Waverunner®, Sea-Doo®, etc.) or on board a sailboard (windsurfer).**

WHAT KIND OF LIFE JACKET SHOULD YOU BUY?

Consider several factors before you buy:

- **Is it comfortable?** Try it on. It should fit snugly but not too tightly.
- **Can you swim or float comfortably in it?**
- **Is it adjustable?** Different weather and temperature conditions require wearing different amounts of clothing. Your life jacket should be adjusted accordingly.

- **Where will you be boating?** If you will be on big lakes, at sea or on white water, choose a life jacket with a higher amount of flotation (buoyancy). If you plan to boat only on calm, inland waters, choose one that will be comfortable to wear all day.

No matter what your boating activity will be, a life jacket does not have to be expensive to be effective. Several life jacket manufacturers show their products on their websites. You can link to these manufacturers' sites from the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission's website at www.fishandboat.com.

CARE OF YOUR LIFE JACKET

- Air dry all wet life jackets before storing.
- Avoid storing life jackets in plastic. Plastic holds moisture that eventually deteriorates the material and thread.
- Check for mildew, leaks or other damage like torn straps or broken zippers. Destroy and replace all damaged units.
- Avoid using life jackets as boat fenders or placing heavy items on them that can crush them.
- Prevent life jackets from contacting oil or grease. This deteriorates the material.

CAUTIONS

- A life jacket should not be considered a substitute for good swimming ability. Although PFDs are an effective aid to buoyancy, swimming skills are still the basic ingredient in water safety.

- Cold water kills. Few people realize the danger involved in a sudden plunge into cold water. Cold water numbs the extremities and limits the reflexes. Life expectancy is greatly shortened in water that's less than 70 degrees. If you find yourself in cold water, you may not have the opportunity or ability to put on a PFD—the life jacket should always be worn when boating on cold water.

- **Remember that 80 percent of all boating deaths could have been prevented if the victims had been wearing a life jacket.**

BOATING SAFETY IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY!

Know before you go!

Knowing about PFDs is just one part of the boating picture. There are other important facts you must understand.

Take a safe boating course. Know and understand all boating laws. Know your capabilities and limits as a boater and a swimmer. Know how to operate your boat. Know the water on which you will be boating. If you are a passenger, learn what to do in an emergency.

To find a classroom boating course near you, or to take online or correspondence courses, check one of the following resources:

Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission website:
www.fishandboat.com

Boating Course Hotline:
1-888-723-4741 (1-888-PAFISH-1)



Produced under a grant from the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund, administered by the U.S. Coast Guard.



12-2010

PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICES



LIFE JACKETS LIFE VESTS LIFE PRESERVERS



Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission

Bureau of Boating and Access
www.fishandboat.com