

BOAT

Pennsylvania

The Keystone State's Official Boating Magazine

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VIEWPOINT

On Wearing a PFD



John Simmons
Director
Bureau of Boating
Pennsylvania Fish Commission

The weather was nice even though the temperature was a bit on the chilly side. The water temperature was cold because the ice had just broken up, but the fish were biting. After all, it had been a long winter and it was time to get out of the house and toss a few plugs at the bass that had been waiting since last fall.

It was a fine day—fine, that is, until something unexpected occurred. No one will ever know exactly what happened. One minute he was in the boat; the next, he was in the water fighting for his life. He lost.

Twice already in this short season, two Pennsylvania boaters lost their gamble with nature. Early season accidents continue to plague our boaters. Some accidents were almost unavoidable. Many were not. A little common sense would have prevented many of these tragedies. Fully half of last year's fatalities could have been avoided if the victims had only worn life jackets.

Not wanting to wear a life jacket on a hot July day is understandable. Not wearing one on a chilly spring day is simply ridiculous. Who do you think you are going to impress? What do you hope to gain—a little convenience? More freedom of movement? If you think a life jacket is going to inconvenience you, think for a moment how inconvenienced your family would be if you didn't come home. Last year, 17 boaters who didn't think it could happen to them didn't make it home.

It doesn't have to be this way. Today's PFD manufacturers have a variety of devices on the market that suit every individual and all needs. You can find devices specifically for the angler, the skier, the paddler, the sailor and for just about every other boating activity. Recently the U.S. Coast Guard approved the use of a special device that combines the buoyancy of foam with the advantages of an inflatable. These devices are a little more expensive than the customary device, but they provide many advantages. If you want maximum freedom of movement and safety, choose one of these devices. But you have to wear it to be legal.

Boating is a fun sport but it can also be dangerous. We will never eliminate all accidents, but through prudent observance of a few basic safety rules, the majority of stupid accidents can be avoided. I never climb into an automobile without ensuring that all my passengers are wearing a seat belt, the most basic driving safety equipment. I also never board a boat without my life jacket. If it is my boat, my passengers as well are fitted with the proper PFDs and they wear them in all but the most harmless situations.

Wearing a life jacket is a little thing that goes a long way toward making boating safer for all. As a teenager, I lost my best friend to a boating accident when the homemade boat he was riding in capsized unexpectedly. He thought he could swim. Don't let the same thing happen to you. Wear your life jacket.

John Simmons

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The covers

This issue's front cover, photographed by Bill and Bert Schill, is an aerial view of the USS *Olympia*, Admiral Dewey's flagship in the battle of Manila during the Spanish-American War, and the World War II guppy-class submarine *Becuna*, berthed in the harbor at Philadelphia's Penn's Landing. For fascinating information on touring Penn's Landing by boat, please turn to page 4. The tow rope in water skiing is a vital link, and you can find vital information on its care and feeding on page 30. Paddlers will want to check out page 26 for practical information on high-water boating. If you're a cruiser, be sure to read the articles beginning on pages 10 and 15, and for a look at one of the largest outboard motor collections in the United States, right here in Pottstown, PA, please turn to page 22.

This issue's back-cover paddler was photographed by R. Hamilton Smith.

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