

BOAT

Pennsylvania



The Keystone State's Official Boating Magazine

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Viewpoint



A Question of Choice



John Simmons
Director
Bureau of Boating
Pennsylvania Fish Commission

Recently we received a letter suggesting that we were being contradictory in *Boat Pennsylvania*. According to one reader, we suggested that boaters wear personal flotation devices, but that the magazine photographs don't always show their use.

Obtaining photographs for a magazine can be a difficult proposition. Sometimes we stage situations and take the photographs ourselves. More often, we rely on photographs submitted by contributors. Photos that depict the general boating public often do not show people wearing PFDs simply because the incidence of wearing them is so low. If we were to say that we would only use photos that showed boaters wearing PFDs, we would have a difficult time finding acceptable photos. Generally, we try to show people wearing PFDs in small boats in situations in which devices should obviously be worn. On large boats, people most often do not wear their PFDs.

Should people wear PFDs? Statistics show that wearing a PFD can save your life. Are PFDs needed all the time? Because accidents happen when they are least expected, wearing a PFD all the time is a good idea. Practically, however, as comfortable as the newest PFDs are, they can be excruciating on a hot July day.

Many boaters also want to get a little sun. We accept this and our statistics show that the chances of having an accident where a PFD would have been a factor are much lower in the summer months. Of course, circumstances do exist in which wearing a PFD, even on the hottest day, is warranted. And anyone canoeing on a fast, cold mountain stream is foolish to do so without a PFD regardless of the season.

But wearing a PFD does not guarantee survival. During 1990, six people died wearing their PFDs. These people were victims of hypothermia. They survived the accident but were not rescued in time to prevent cold water from taking its toll. Should they have boated without their PFDs? Certainly not. Their PFDs at least gave them a chance.

Statistics do not show the number of people who survived because they wore their PFDs. In cold water, in stormy weather, or when participating in certain types of boating, wearing a PFD is a must.

Children are required to wear PFDs on state park and Fish Commission waters. Parents often make their kids wear PFDs even though they don't wear one themselves. These regulations and parental requirements must work. Only one child under the age of 16 drowned in a boating accident in the past 10 years.

Sailboarders and personal watercraft (PWC) operators are also required to wear PFDs. No fatalities have occurred on sailboards and the two fatalities we have had on a PWC were the result of collisions. PFDs were not a factor.

Kayakers routinely wear PFDs voluntarily. Except for the occasional entrapment in their boats, fatalities in kayaks are rare. Water skiers have been required to wear PFDs for 20 years, and during the past 15 years only two skiers have been killed.

Water skiing, kayaking, sailboarding and operating personal watercraft are hazardous types of boat operation. Yet, wearing PFDs has kept the number of fatalities relatively low. On the other hand, in the past 20 years hundreds of people have died in small boats and canoes. Had these people been wearing PFDs, many would be alive today.

Sportsmen have learned that wearing fluorescent orange has had a dramatic effect on the number of hunting accidents. Yet, many of these same individuals fail to recognize the importance of a personal flotation device for their safety. Great strides have been made in recent years toward the goal of changing the image of wearing PFDs. There are fewer reckless boaters now than there were 20 years ago. Despite a near tripling in the number of boats operating in Pennsylvania, the number of fatalities has decreased.

We will continue to urge boaters to use common sense. The Commission is dedicated to eliminating fatalities from boating accidents, although we will never reach our goal of no fatalities. In 1989, only 13 Pennsylvania boaters died in boating accidents. Last year 27 did—many of them were in small boats and did not wear PFDs. We can do better.

The Commission has directed its staff to study the need for further regulations concerning wearing PFDs. What are your opinions about wearing PFDs? Should it be required? Under what circumstances? Have you had any experiences that have changed the way you approach wearing a PFD? Let us know what you think. We would like to hear from you.

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The covers

This issue's front cover, photographed by Lycoming Countian Terry Wild, is an invitation to boating fun this spring. The personal watercraft enthusiasts in the picture are enjoying the Susquehanna River at Lock Haven. The back cover, a water skier getting ready to go, is also an invitation to a season of fun. And speaking of invitations, there's plenty in this issue to entice boaters. Sailors will want to check out the stories on pages 18 and 28, and water skiers should scan the article on page 16. All boat owners should read the articles beginning on pages 4 and 12, and paddlers can get a lot out of the article on page 8. Do you cruise or sail with your pet dog or cat? If you do, the article on page 24 is the cat's meow.