

Safety Tips for Recreational Boats

Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs)

All recreational boats must carry one wearable PFD (Type I, II, III or Type V PFD) for each person aboard. A Type V PFD provides performance of either a Type I, II, or III PFD (as marked on its label) and must be used according to the label requirements. Any boat 16ft and longer (except canoes and kayaks) must also carry one throwable PFD (Type IV PFD).

PFDs must be

- *Coast Guard approved,*
- *in good and serviceable condition, and*
- *the appropriate size for the intended user.*

Accessibility

- Wearable PFDs must be readily accessible.
- You must be able to put them on in a reasonable amount of time in an emergency (vessel sinking, on fire, etc.).
- They should not be stowed in plastic bags, in locked or closed compartments or have other gear stowed on top of them.
- The best PFD is the one you will wear.
- Though not required, a PFD should be worn at all times when the vessel is underway. A wearable PFD can save your life, but only if you wear it.
- Throwable devices must be immediately available for use.

Inflatable PFDs

- Inflatable PFDs may be more comfortable to wear.
- The best PFD is the one you will wear.
- Inflatable PFDs require the user to pay careful attention to the condition of the device.
- Inflatable PFDs must have a full cylinder and all status indicators on the inflator must be green, or the device is NOT serviceable, and does NOT satisfy the requirement to carry PFDs.
- Coast Guard Approved Inflatable PFD's are authorized for use on recreational boats by person at least 16 years of age.

Child PFD Requirements

Some states require that children wear PFDs

- applies to children of specific ages
- applies to certain sizes of boats
- applies to specific boating operations

Check with your state boating safety officials.

Child PFD approvals are based on the child's weight. Check the "User Weight" on the label, or the approval statement that will read something like "Approved for use on recreational boats and uninspected commercial vessels not carrying passengers for hire, by persons weighing ___ lbs". They can be marked "less than 30", "30 to 50", "less than 50", or "50 to 90".

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PFD requirements for certain boating activities under state laws

The Coast Guard recommends and many states require wearing PFDs:

- For water skiing and other towed activities (use a PFD marked for water skiing).
- While operating personal watercraft (PWC) (use a PFD marked for water skiing or PWC use).
- During white water boating activities.
- While sailboarding (under Federal law, sailboards are not "boats").

Check with your state boating safety officials.

Federal law does not require PFDs on racing shells, rowing sculls, racing canoes, and racing kayaks; state laws vary. Check with your state boating safety officials.

If you are boating in an area under the jurisdiction of the Army Corps of Engineers, or a federal, state, or local park authority, other rules may apply.

PFD Flotation

There are three basic kinds of PFD flotation in the five types of PFDs with the following characteristics:

Inherently Buoyant (primarily Foam)

- Adult, Youth, Child, and Infant sizes
- For swimmers & non-swimmers
- Wearable & throwable styles
- Some designed for water sports

Minimum Buoyancy		
Wearable Size	Type	Inherent Buoyancy (Foam)
Adult	I II & III V	22 lb. 15.5 lb. 15.5 to 22 lb.
Youth	II & III V	11 lb. 11 to 15.5 lb.
Child and Infant	II	7 lb.
Throwable: Cushion Ring Buoy	IV	20 lb. 16.5 & 32 lb.

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Inflatable

- The most compact
- Sizes only for adults
- Only recommended for swimmers
- Wearable styles only
- Some with the best in-water performance

Minimum Buoyancy		
Wearable Size	Type	Inherent Buoyancy
Adult	I & II III V	34 lb. 22.5 lb. 22.5 to 34 lb.

Hybrid (Foam & Inflation)

- Reliable
- Adult, Youth, and Child sizes
- For swimmers & non-swimmers
- Wearable styles only
- Some designed for water sports

Minimum Buoyancy			
Wearable Size	Type	Inherent Buoyancy	Inflated Total Buoyancy
Adult	II & III	10 lb	22 lb.
	V	7.5 lb.	22 lb.
Youth	II & III	9 lb	15 lb.
	V	7.5 lb.	15 lb.
Child	II	7 lb.	12 lb.