

NEWS

Oregon State Marine Board
Oregon's Recreational Boating Agency



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Facts about Personal Flotation Devices

Personal Flotation Device (PFD): A Real Lifesaver

- According to national U.S. Coast Guard statistics, during 2009, 736 boaters died and 3,358 were injured. Eighty-four percent of the victims were not wearing life jackets or personal flotation devices (PFDs).
- The number of nationwide recreational boating fatalities went up from 2008.
- Almost three-fourths of all fatal boating accident victims drowned.
- Only fourteen percent of deaths occurred on boats where the operator had received boating safety education.
- Seven out of every ten boaters who drowned were using boats less than 21 feet in length.
- Operator inattention, operator inexperience, excessive speed, improper lookout and alcohol rank as the top five contributing factors in accidents.

Oregon Law

- There must be at least one properly fitting, U.S. Coast Guard-approved PFD for each person onboard the boat, including persons being towed.
- Children 12 years of age and younger must wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved PFD at all times while on an open deck or in the cockpit of vessels that are underway. Non-swimmers should always wear PFDs.
- Each person onboard a personal watercraft must wear an approved PFD (Type I, II or III) for the water activity.
- PFDs should be readily accessible for use in case of an emergency — not stowed in closed compartments or still in the packaging.
- Inflatable PFDs are not approved for youth under 16 years of age or for high-impact sports, such as water skiing or operating personal watercraft. Newer inflatable PFDs have been approved by the Coast Guard for offshore use.
- All boaters are required to wear a properly fitting, Coast Guard-approved PFD when operating a boat in Class III white water rapids or higher.

Proper Fit and Maintenance

- Choose a PFD that fits and is appropriate for the type of boating you will be doing. A PFD that does not fit properly can be just as dangerous as not wearing one at all. Check the label for restrictions and limitations on its use and performance type.
- Most adults need an extra seven to 12 pounds of buoyancy to keep their heads above water. Your weight, body fat, lung size, clothing and water conditions are factors to be considered in determining how much extra buoyancy you need.
- To test the proper fit for an adult, use the “touchdown test.” With the jacket on, raise your arms as though signaling a touchdown. Look to your left and right and over your shoulders. If the chest part of the PFD does not hit your chin, then the device most likely fits.
- A good test for children is to have them stand normally with their arms at their sides. Grab the PFD at the shoulders and lift up firmly. If the PFD moves above the mid-point of their ears, then the device does not fit properly.
- Proper upkeep of your PFD is essential to keeping it in working order. Always air-dry your PFD thoroughly before stowing it. Regularly inspect the devices for mildew, leaks, hardened stuffing, or insecure straps and buckles. Avoid contact with oil and grease, which causes PFDs to deteriorate and lose buoyancy. For inflatable PFD’s, be sure to test them out, and replace the CO2 cartridges annually.



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For more information about personal flotation devices, contact Ashley Massey, OSMB public affairs specialist at 503.378.2623 or visit <http://www.boatoregon.com/OSMB/safety/Lifejacket.shtml>