

NEWS

Oregon State Marine Board

Boat Oregon!



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All About Life Jackets

Today's Life Jacket: Style, Variety and Comfort

Most boaters know they're required to have a properly fitting, U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket on board for every passenger on their boat. But what keeps people from actually wearing a life jacket? It's surprising when you ask adults why they don't wear one. "I won't fall overboard," "I've been boating my entire life," or "I've been out on this same lake for decades and nothing's ever happened." The "It won't happen to me," complacent attitude is actually the very thing that many accident survivors now regret having had. The Oregon State Marine Board and other boating safety advocates recommend that all boaters and passengers not only have a life jacket, but "Wear It!" at all times while boating.



Accidents on the water happen too fast to put one on in an emergency. U.S. Coast Guard statistics show that drowning was the reported cause of death in almost three-fourths of recreational boating fatalities in 2015, and that 84 percent of those who drowned were not wearing life jackets. That's why boating safety advocates continue to push for increased and consistent life jacket wear on the water.

Life jacket designs are much more comfortable, lightweight and stylish than the old, bulky orange style most boaters envision. Life jackets that use inflatable technologies are keep the wearer cool and comfortable and resemble a pair of suspenders or a belt pack. Many inflate automatically when immersed in water.

Other life jacket styles are available for almost any boating activity:

For fishing: Vest-style life jackets come with features such as pockets and clips to replace the fishing vest and keep the angler safe.

For personal watercraft and water sports: Inherently buoyant, lighter-weight life jackets are rugged, with multiple buckles and clasps to keep them secure after impact with the water.

For hunting and cold weather: Full coats and suits are available in camouflage colors for waterfowl hunting and for those who boat when air and water temperatures are cool.

For paddling: Special life jackets are designed with large openings for arms to allow ease of movement.

For children: Virtually all styles are available sized especially for children – some with cartoon characters, straps for pulling children from the water, and high-visibility schemes.

For pets: Life jackets are even available for our four-legged friends. It's helpful to purchase one with a handle on top to easily pull your pet out of the water, if needed.

No matter what the activity or style chosen, the most important thing is this: remember to grab a life jacket and "Wear It!"

How to Choose the Right Life Jacket

Looking for a life jacket? Today's life jackets come in a variety of shapes, sizes, colors and materials. No matter which life jacket you choose, be sure it's right for YOU, your planned activities, and the water conditions you expect to encounter.

Try It On

- Check the manufacturer's ratings for your size and weight to get started.
- Make sure the life jacket is properly zipped or buckled.
- Raise your arms straight up over your head while wearing your life jacket and grab the shoulder material, gently pulling up.
- If there is excess room above the openings and the life jacket rides up over your chin or face, it does NOT fit properly. A **snug** fit in these areas signals a properly fitting life jacket.



Fit Facts

- It is extremely important that you choose a properly fitting life jacket.
- Life jackets that are too big will cause the flotation device to push up around your face, which could be dangerous.
- Life jackets that are too small will not be able to keep your body afloat.

Important Reminders

- Make sure your life jacket is U.S. Coast Guard-approved.
- Double check that your life jacket is appropriate for your favorite boating activities.
- Life jackets meant for adults do not work for children. If you are boating with children, make sure they are wearing properly fitted, child-sized life jackets. Do not buy a life jacket for your child to "grow into."

On recreational vessels underway, children *under 13* years old must wear a Coast Guard -approved life jacket unless they are below decks or in an enclosed cabin.

For more information about life jackets and water safety, visit www.boatoregon.com.

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