

All About Life Jackets

Today's Life Jacket: Style, Variety and Comfort

Most boaters know they are required to have a properly fitting, U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket on board for every passenger on their boat to meet carriage requirements. But what keeps people from wearing a life jacket? It is surprising when you ask adults why they do not wear one. "I won't fall overboard," "I've been boating my entire life," or "I'm a good swimmer." The "It won't happen to me," complacent attitude is the very thing that many accident survivors now regret having had. The Oregon State Marine Board and other boating safety partners advocate everyone recreating on the water wear a life jacket 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 75% of [recreational boating fatalities in 2023](#), and that 85 percent of those who drowned were not wearing life jackets. That is why boating safety advocates continue to push for increased and consistent life jacket wear on the water.

Life jacket styles are comfortable, lightweight, and stylish.

It is time to normalize and make life jacket wear more socially acceptable.

Life jacket styles are available for any boating activity:



For more information about life jackets and water safety, visit Boat.Oregon.gov.

How to Choose the Right 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 is 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. Inflatable styles use CO2 cartridges that provide maximum buoyancy but can also become "over inflated" for different users. Be sure to know how to adjust the harness for full inflation. Belt packs can be worn comfortably in the front of the wearer so that it does not "ride up."
- 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.
- 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." All children under 13 are required to wear a properly fitting, US Coast Guard-approved life jacket when the boat is underway unless they are below deck or in an enclosed cabin. Inflatable life jackets are not approved for children under 16.
- Inflatable styles require annual maintenance and have different fitting standards. Always follow the manufacturer's maintenance instructions and get comfortable with using the manual inflation tube.



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