

Personal Flotation Devices

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The most critical piece of safety equipment on any boat are personal flotation devices (PFDs), or life jackets. Most boating-related deaths involve people who are not wearing PFDs. The US Coast Guard estimates that about 80 percent of boating fatality victims would have survived if they were wearing PFDs. PFDs help in two ways. First, they keep you afloat. Second, particularly in the colder waters of the northern lakes, they keep more of your body above water and let you float using less energy, thus delaying the onset of hypothermia.

Federal and State Law require the carriage of PFDs onboard. The US Coast Guard certifies PFDs and divides them into different Types. See www.uscgboating.org for more information. To meet USCG requirements, a boat must have a USCG-approved Type I, II, III or V for each person on board, plus one type IV throwable device. States also have laws concerning life jacket wear by children. You should be familiar with both the Federal USCG and State requirements.



Please note that if you choose to carry an inflatable that meets Mac SER (Safety Equipment Requirements), it does not exempt you from USCG requirements. Some inflatables - notably the Spinlock Deckvest - are NOT USCG certified and thus do not count towards the USCG requirements. Thus, you may need to carry a USCG Type I, II or III in addition to the inflatable.

To comply with Mac SERs, these PFDs must also have a whistle, a waterproof light, reflective material, be marked with the boat or wearer's name, and be compatible with the safety harness. Additionally, the SERs require that each crew member have a tether/harness and carry a safety knife (separate "Sailing Safety Articles" address tethers/harnesses and knives). Give some thought to how you can reach

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this knife and/or release your tether when wearing your PFD. Will the inflated PFD make it impossible for you to grab the knife in an emergency? We encourage you to orally inflate your PFD (if inflatable) to see just how easily you can find and use your knife and/or release your tether in these circumstances.

A man overboard situation at night is much more serious in general than one during the day. Having adequate flotation is thus even more critical at night. We encourage all competitors and Persons in Charge to consider wearing a PFD at all times when out of the cabin, especially at night. No one can predict when a MOB will occur.

Finally, all life vests should be periodically inspected, especially if your PFD is inflatable. Follow the manufacturer's recommendations to test it. It is critical that all PFDs be properly examined and tested at least annually. You won't have time to do that when it comes time to use the PFD! Good resources are:

<http://www.boatsafe.com/nauticalknowhow/testpfd.htm>

<https://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg5/cg545/alerts/0716.pdf>

Additional Resources:

BoatUS Foundation:

<http://www.boatus.com/foundation/Findings/50/default.asp>

USCG BoatSafe:

<http://www.uscgboating.org>

If you have any questions, please contact us at safety@byc.com, macchair@byc.com, office@byc.com or through the BYC office @ 313-822-1853

Note: The purpose of this article is to highlight concepts for how you and your crew can race as safely as possible. As always, ultimate responsibility for the safety of the crew and the decision whether to race or to stop racing is that of the skipper (RRS4, MSR2). This email is meant as a courtesy only and you should always refer to the Notice of Race, Sailing Instructions and Safety Regulations, which govern the race.

Credits to Matt Gallagher and the Chicago Yacht Club for the original content of this Sailing Safety Series Article