



U. S. COAST GUARD

INFORMATION SHEET



LIFE JACKET/PFD (PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICE) WEAR

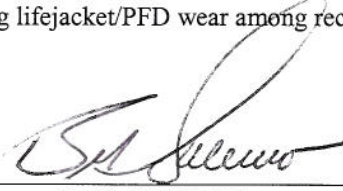
ISSUE: Increasing the wear rate of lifejackets/PFDs among the boating public to reduce the number of boating fatalities due to drowning.

BACKGROUND: Coast Guard regulations require that each recreational boat be equipped with an appropriate lifejacket/PFD for each person on board. However, many States have established laws or regulations further requiring that children, water-skiers, persons being towed behind a recreational vessel, and riders on personal watercraft wear appropriate lifejackets/PFDs. In June 2002, the Coast Guard promulgated its first regulations requiring boaters to wear lifejackets/PFDs, specifically children under thirteen years of age. Recreational boating accident statistics show that the proximate cause of death in over 70% of all boating accidents each year is drowning. Furthermore, approximately 85% of the drownings involve victims who were not wearing lifejackets/PFDs at the time of the drowning.

DISCUSSION: The Coast Guard's National Recreational Boating Safety Program has recognized that drowning is the major cause of recreational boating fatalities and has focused much of its efforts, through various initiatives, to attempt to increase the lifejacket/PFD wear rate among recreational boaters. In addition, the National Boating Safety Advisory Council (NBSAC) passed a resolution in 2004 recognizing the need to significantly increase the lifejacket/PFD wear rate. The Coast Guard believes that any initiatives – such as the introduction of inflatable lifejackets/PFDs or other technological improvement, or boater education campaigns that increase the lifejacket/PFD wear rate can avert recreational boating drowning fatalities. Statistically valid estimates of the lifejacket/PFD wear rate among boaters, such as the eight-year (1998-2005) study conducted by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc., under a Coast Guard Boating Safety Grant show that lifejacket/PFD wear by adults on open motorboats, rowboats, and canoes less than 21' in length is minimal. The problem is similar to the history behind the wearing of seat belts in automobiles. It took a concerted effort on the part of the automobile and insurance industries, Federal and State enforcement agencies, and national safety organizations to significantly increase the wear rate of seat belts. As boaters continue to resist wearing lifejackets/PFDs, the Coast Guard continues to consider the need for, and effective alternatives to, requirements for those boaters statistically most at risk of drowning to wear lifejackets/PFDs.

The Coast Guard strongly encourages lifejacket/PFD wear at all times. The Coast Guard particularly advocates that those aboard a vessel less than 21 feet in length wear their lifejacket/PFD at all times while aboard such a vessel in order to increase their survival in a boating incident and unexpected entry into the water. The Coast Guard encourages any Coast Guard District, other Federal agencies, State or local jurisdictions voluntary initiatives directed at increasing lifejacket/PFD wear among recreational boaters.

APPROVED: _____


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DATE: _____

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