

# HOW TO CHOOSE THE **RIGHT** **LIFE JACKET**



*A Handy Guide from Your  
U.S. Coast Guard*





## *U.S. Coast Guard life jacket requirements for recreational vessels:*

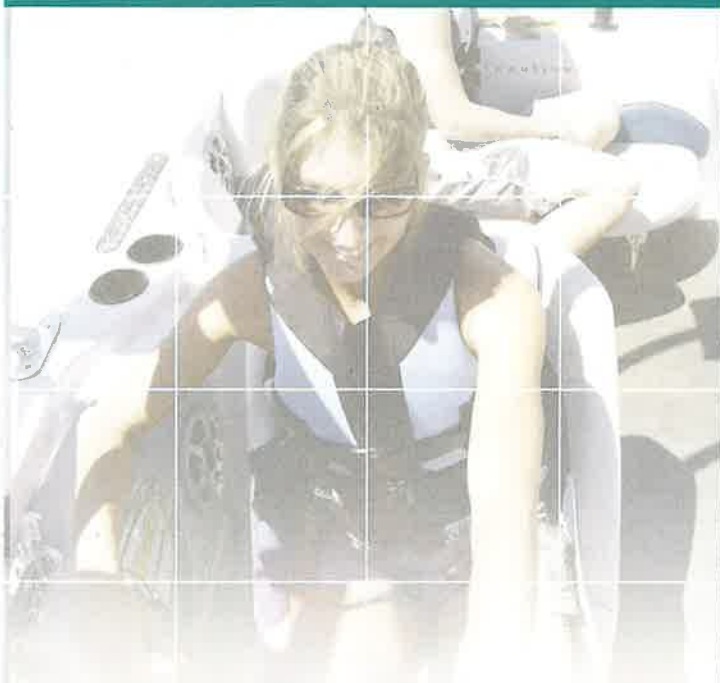
A wearable life jacket for each person must be aboard.

These life jackets must be...

- U. S. Coast Guard approved
- The proper size for the intended wearer
- In good and serviceable condition
- Properly stowed (readily accessible)

When a vessel is underway with children under 13 years old, they must be wearing a life jacket unless they are below deck or in an enclosed cabin.

*Note: On some state waters this age requirement may vary. Boaters are encouraged to check with their respective state boating authority regarding these requirements.*

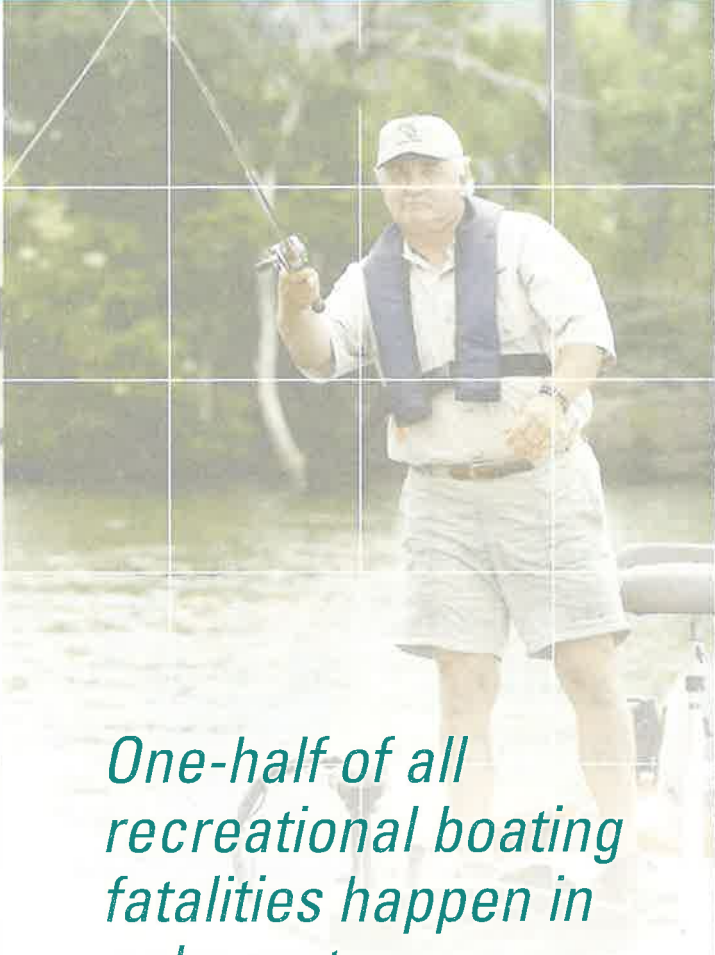


*Skydivers wear their parachutes...*

*Football players wear their helmets...*

*Drivers wear their seat belts...*

*Responsible boaters wear their life jackets!*



*One-half of all recreational boating fatalities happen in calm water.*

These fatalities occur close to shore and are caused by drowning. Also, in most cases, life jackets are stowed on board, but not worn.

*And all are unexpected.*

The U.S. Coast Guard recommends that you wear — not just carry — a life jacket while boating.



## *Life jackets are available for...*

- Cruising, paddling, waterskiing, hunting, angling, racing
- Men, women, children, and even pets
- Swimmers and non-swimmers
- Boaters of all sizes
- Many uses, and come in many colors and styles

A group of people, including children and adults, are sitting on a boat. They are all wearing life jackets. The scene is outdoors, likely on a body of water. The image is slightly faded and has a grid overlay.

## *If a life jacket fits properly...*

It will help keep your head above the water. Too big, and the life jacket will ride up around your face. Too small, it will not be able to keep your body afloat.

Life jackets designed for adults will not work for children!

### *Try It On For Size*

- #1 Check the manufacturer's label to ensure that the life jacket is a proper fit for your size and weight.
- #2 Make sure the jacket is properly fastened.
- #3 Hold your arms straight up over your head.
- #4 Ask a friend to grasp the tops of the arm openings and gently pull up.
- #5 Make sure there is no excess room above the openings and that the jacket does not ride up over your chin or face.

For the best fit, try the life jacket in shallow water under safe and supervised conditions.

## *Auto Inflatable*



- 
- Inflates automatically upon immersion or manual activation
  - Comfortable and cool
  - May turn unconscious wearer face up
  - Requires regular maintenance\*
  - Not for children under 16 or non-swimmers
  - Not for sports where immersion is expected (whitewater paddling, waterskiing, etc.)
- 

*"It only takes a second to put on a life jacket.  
That second could save your life."*

– Boating accident survivor

\* Refer to OWNER'S MANUAL for maintenance requirements

### *Manual Inflatable*



- 
- Only inflates upon manual activation
  - Comfortable and cool
  - May turn unconscious wearer face up
  - Requires regular maintenance\*
  - Not for children under 16 or non-swimmers
  - Not for sports where immersion is expected (whitewater paddling, waterskiing, etc.)
- 

\* Refer to OWNER'S MANUAL for maintenance requirements





### *Belt Pack Inflatable*

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- Inflates automatically upon immersion or manual activation
  - Extremely easy to wear
  - Requires regular maintenance\*
  - Must be placed over head after inflation
  - Not for children under 16 or non-swimmers
  - Not for sports where immersion is expected (whitewater paddling, waterskiing, etc.)
- 
- 

*"I am thankful I had my life jacket on . . . and that it wasn't lying on the bottom of the boat. Otherwise, I wouldn't have made it. I never get in a boat, no matter how short the ride is, without my life jacket. Never."*

– Boating accident survivor

\* Refer to OWNER'S MANUAL for maintenance requirements

### *Vest Type*



- 
- May turn unconscious wearer face up
  - Requires little maintenance\*
  - Good for non-swimmers
  - Good flotation
  - Less bulky than offshore vests
- 

*"I'll remember that day for as long as I live. If I had not had my life jacket on, I know I would have died."*

– Boating accident survivor

\* Refer to OWNER'S MANUAL for maintenance requirements



### *Children's Hybrid\* Inflatable*

- Inherently buoyant, also inflates automatically upon immersion or manual activation
- Requires regular maintenance\*\*
- May turn unconscious wearer face up
- Not for sports where immersion is expected (whitewater paddling, waterskiing, etc.)

\* A life jacket constructed from two components; inherently buoyant material and an inflatable chamber

\*\* Refer to OWNER'S MANUAL for maintenance requirements

## *Children's Life Jacket*



- 
- Designed for possible immersion
  - May not turn unconscious wearer face up
  - Requires little maintenance\*
  - May have special safety features for children
- 

*"Life jackets have to fit in order to work. That's why it's so important that children wear life jackets especially designed for their size."*

– Boating safety advocate

\* Refer to OWNER'S MANUAL for maintenance requirements



### *Flotation Aid*

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- Comfortable
  - Stylish
  - Requires little maintenance\*
  - May not turn unconscious wearer face up
- 

*“When I fell in the water and my boat disappeared, I was scared . . . but I knew I had my life jacket on and that would keep my head above water.”*

– Boating accident survivor

\* Refer to OWNER’S MANUAL for maintenance requirements



## *Vest-Type Flotation Aid*

- 
- Designed for possible immersion
  - May not turn unconscious wearer face up
  - Requires little maintenance\*
  - Rugged construction
  - Designed for waterskiing or other high impact, high speed activities
- 

\* Refer to OWNER'S MANUAL for maintenance requirements

*Mesh Camo*



- 
- Designed for waterfowl hunting
  - Quilted shooting patch on right shoulder
  - Mesh pocket for storage
  - Special fit allows for freedom of movement
  - May not turn unconscious wearer face up
-

## *Float Coat*



- 
- Designed for waterfowl hunting in cold weather
  - Hip-length, concealed hood, 2-way zipper with storm flap
  - May help prevent hypothermia
  - May not turn unconscious wearer face up
- 

*“Most sportsmen think that nothing bad can happen on the water. But accidents do happen, and a life jacket or a float coat can make the difference between life and death.”*



## *Inflatable Fishing Vest*



- 
- Inflates automatically upon immersion or manual activation
  - Includes pockets and straps for supplies and tackle
  - May turn unconscious wearer face up
  - Requires regular maintenance\*
  - Not for children under 16 or non-swimmers
  - Not for sports where immersion is expected (whitewater paddling, waterskiing, etc.)
- 

\* Refer to OWNER'S MANUAL for maintenance requirements

## Offshore Vest



- 
- Intended for boating offshore, open water, and coastal cruising
  - Offers the most flotation
  - May help prevent hypothermia
  - Bulky
  - Designed to turn an unconscious person face up
- 

*“Many people don’t realize that some life jackets, such as a vest, help with more than flotation. It can actually help your body conserve heat and ward off hypothermia.”*



## *Touring & Whitewater Paddling Jacket*



- 
- Intended for canoeing, kayaking, rafting, and whitewater activities
  - Special fit allows for freedom of movement
  - May not turn unconscious wearer face up
  - Requires little maintenance
- 

*"When our kayak capsized, I had on my life jacket and made it to land safely. My friend did not have on his life jacket and a 20-year annual outing ended that day. He lost his life."*

– Boating accident survivor

*The U.S. Coast Guard thanks the following partners for their support:*

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