

Coast Guard Aux NEWS ▶

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Life Jackets Save Lives - Yours!

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For many years, we referred to life-jackets as "PFD's" - Personal Flotation Devices. Jeesh, can the lawyers get over it? OK, not everyone in a life jacket survives. Roughly only 15 out of 16... Conversely, if you go in the water without a life jacket, only one guy comes out. The other 15 died. Life jackets save lives. This column is about that.

The Statistics

Boaters end up in the water for a variety of reasons but the two largest - capsizes and falls overboard - comprise nearly 60% of all fatalities. Let me rephrase that. A fatality is a death - let's not mince words like "PFDs." Unless you had your life jacket on when you went into the "drink", you're not getting it on. Remember, for every 16 boaters that go into the water without a life jacket, only one comes out. The other 15 died.

But you are experienced. Well, another statistic I've seen is this. Boaters who have over 100 hours of boating experience - and are 35 or older - and who have NOT taken a formal boating safety class - account for over half of all boating accidents. Oh, they are also responsible for over half the fatalities - deaths - too. If you haven't taken a boating safety class yet, or haven't taken one in a long time, email me below and I will help you find one in your neighborhood...

Data courtesy of 2007 National Life Jacket Wear Study - JSI Research & Training Institute

And, if you have been smart enough to take a boating safety class, remember this. You're not alone out there. Take a look at the table.

What to Wear by Who?

USCG regulations require a life jacket aboard for very boater aboard unless they are

under 13 years old. Then they have to be on. But didn't I make the point above that if you do fall overboard and you don't have one on, it is pretty unlikely you'll be able to get into one? Isn't it too late then? Yes, yes, yes! So why only have the kids wear it? And all those kids, seeing dad not wearing one, are saying to themselves, "I can't wait until I'm old enough not to wear one..." What a lesson you're teaching, skipper. I'll tell you a story that ought to bring the point home. One fine day while patrolling Moriches Bay, we came upon a family fishing in an open boat. It looked like there were children aboard and further we couldn't see any with life jackets on. As we approached, I heard the grandfather say to one of the kids, "Get down, the Coast Guard is coming!" Unfortunately for grandpa, sound travels well over the water and I heard it at the helm. As we came alongside, I gave the wheel to one of my crew and walked up to where our boats were closest together. All I said to grandpa was, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself." We watched, without another word, as all the children put their life-jackets on.

Oh They Are So Bulky!

Come on, bunky, are you still using the ones from the Titanic? Modern life jackets come in many sizes, many colors and are as light as a feather. You can get them in "camo" mode for hunting; you can get ones that self-inflate if you do fall in; you can get them in matching colors!

You can even get children's style that have a loop at the collar so you can scoop them up, one-two-three, if the tyke falls in! And don't forget one for the old sea dog - and his pet.

In short, wear one all the time. Life jackets save lives... And the life you save may be your own. BTW, if you are interested in being part of USCG Forces, email me at JoinUSCGAux2009@aol.com or go direct to Lisa Etter, who is in charge of new members matters, at FSO-PS@emcg.us and we will help you "get in this thing..."