

Personal Flotation Devices (Life Jackets)

All vessels must be equipped with U.S. Coast Guard–approved life jackets, called personal flotation devices (PFDs). The quantity and type depend on the length of your vessel and the number of people on board and/or being towed. Each PFD must be in good condition, be the proper size for the intended wearer, and very importantly, be readily accessible! Readily accessible means you must be able to put the PFD on in a reasonable amount of time in an emergency (vessel sinking, on fire, etc.). PFDs should not be stowed in plastic bags or in locked or closed compartments, and they should not have other gear stowed on top of them.

Vessel operators should ask everyone on their vessel to wear a PFD whenever on the water. *PFDs can save lives, but only if they are worn!*

PFD Requirements

- All boats must have at least one **U.S. Coast Guard–approved** Type I, II, or III personal flotation device that is wearable, and of the proper size for each person on board or being towed. Sizing for PFDs is based on body weight and chest size.
- Each person on board must wear a U.S. Coast Guard–approved Type I, II, III, or V PFD while underway on a motorboat less than 16 feet long using an outboard motor that is steered by a hand tiller or steering arm attached to the motor. This requirement does not apply to electronic trolling motors.
- In addition to the above requirements, boats 16 feet in length or longer must have one **U.S. Coast Guard–approved** Type IV PFD on board and readily accessible.
- All PFDs must be in good and serviceable condition and must be readily accessible.
- Louisiana law requires that all children 16 years of age and younger wear a U.S. Coast Guard–approved PFD while underway on a vessel less than 26 feet long. The PFD must be fastened and of the proper size for the child.
- Each person riding on a PWC must wear a U.S. Coast Guard–approved Type I, II, III, or V personal flotation device.

PFD Descriptions

TYPE I: Offshore Life Jackets

These vests are geared for rough or remote waters where rescue may take awhile. They provide the most buoyancy, are excellent for flotation, and will turn most unconscious persons face up in the water.

TYPE II: Near-Shore Vests

These vests are good for calm waters when quick assistance or rescue is likely. Type II vests will turn some unconscious wearers face up in the water, but the turning is not as pronounced as with a Type I.

TYPE III: Flotation Aids

These vests or full-sleeved jackets are good for calm waters when quick assistance or rescue is likely. They are not for rough waters since they will not turn most unconscious persons face up. Type III PFDs are used for water sports, such as water-skiing. Some Type III PFDs are designed to inflate when you enter the water.

TYPE IV: Throwable Devices/Not Wearable

These cushions and ring buoys are designed to be thrown to someone in trouble. Since a Type IV PFD is not designed to be worn, it is neither for rough waters nor for persons who are unable to hold onto it.

TYPE V: Special-Use Devices

These vests, deck suits, hybrid PFDs, and others are designed for specific activities such as windsurfing, kayaking, or water-skiing. Some Type V PFDs are designed to inflate when you enter the water. *To be acceptable, Type V PFDs must be used in accordance with their label.*

BOATER'S TIP!

An emergency situation (rough water, rapid onset of bad weather, or dangerous boating traffic) can occur suddenly—leaving little or no time to put on life jackets. Life jackets are very difficult to put on once you are in the water. Be a smart boater, and have everyone on board your vessel wear their life jackets at all times.

Types of Personal Flotation Devices

Read and follow the label restrictions on all PFDs.

