

A life jacket is considered an aid. It should not be considered a substitute for good swimming ability.

Wear a properly fitting, U.S. Coast Guard approved life jacket; it can save your life.



Which Type of Life Jacket Should I Wear?

Within the legal requirements, the type of life jacket that you choose to carry on board is a matter of personal choice. Some types offer greater protection, and some offer freedom of movement or are designed for special uses.

Make sure to try it on for size.

- Check the manufacturer's label to ensure that the life jacket is a proper fit for your size and weight.
- Make sure the jacket is properly fastened.
- Hold your arms straight up over your head.
- Ask a friend to grasp the top of the jacket's arm openings and gently pull up.
- Make sure there is no excess room between the shoulder and the jacket. The jacket should not ride up over your chin, ears or face.

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 chin or face. Too small, it will not be able to keep your body afloat. Life jackets designed for adults will not work for children.

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

Recommended Use

Children, the elderly and non-swimmers should always wear their life jackets while the boat is under way. In rough water it is recommended that everyone on board wear a life jacket.

When boating in cold water, life jackets should be worn **at all times**. Cold water can numb the extremities and slow reflexes almost immediately. Should you fall into cold water, you may not have the opportunity or the ability to put on a life jacket.

Each passenger on board should know where the life jackets are located and should make sure their wearable



device fits properly. It is a good idea to hold a practice emergency drill on the proper use of life jackets at least once each year. Practice swimming and floating while wearing a life jacket. Try putting one on while in the water.

Families should mark each person's device with their name and stow it with the name facing up in an accessible, well-ventilated area out of the sun. Children's life jackets should be checked periodically for proper fit.

Remember that a life jacket is considered an aid; it should not be considered a substitute for good swimming ability.

Safety means always wearing a life jacket in rough waters.



BOATING SAFETY CLASSES are conducted throughout California by the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, the U.S. Power Squadrons and certain chapters of the American Red Cross. For more information on classes, call: (800) SEA-SKIL (732-7545). The Department of Boating and Waterways also offers a free home study course entitled *California Boating, a Course for Safe Boating*.



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Safety First



Life Jackets and the Law



STATE OF CALIFORNIA
Department of Boating
and Waterways

WHAT IS A LIFE JACKET?

A life jacket is the cheapest form of insurance you can buy. Most boating accidents involve falls overboard, capsizing or sinkings. A properly fitted and correctly used life jacket can save your life. In fact, 85 percent of the boaters who drown as a result of boating accidents would have survived if they had simply been wearing the life jackets most of them carried on board.

Life Jackets and the Law

State law requires that all children under 13 years of age wear a Type I, II, III or V U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket while on board a vessel that is 26 feet or less in length while the vessel is underway. Exceptions:

- On a sailboat, if the child is restrained by a harness tethered to the sailboat.
- If the child is in an enclosed cabin.

In addition, any person aboard a personal watercraft or being towed behind a vessel on water skis, an

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aquaplane or similar device, must wear a Type I, II, III or V U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket. Exceptions:

- The law does not apply to performers engaged in professional exhibitions, official regattas, marine parades or tournaments. Any person engaged in slalom skiing on a marked course, or barefoot, jump or trick waterskiing, may instead wear a wet-suit designed for the activity and labeled by the manufacturer as a water ski wet-suit. However, for each skier who elects to wear a wet-suit, a Type I, II, III or V life jacket must be carried on board.
- Persons using any underwater maneuvering device are exempt from wearing a life jacket. An underwater maneuvering device is any towed or self-powered apparatus designed for underwater use that a person can pilot through diving, turning and surfacing maneuvers.

The U.S. Coast Guard approved inflatable life jackets in 1996. Only certain brands are U.S. Coast Guard-approved, so check the label. While activation upon impact is not a required feature, inflatables must be equipped, at a minimum, with both a manual (pull) and oral inflation system. They are approved for persons 16 years of age or older, and must be wearable-type life jackets.

The number and type of U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets required to be carried on a vessel depends on the length of the craft and the number of persons on board. There are five types of life jackets approved for use aboard recreational craft. State and federal law requires that:

- All boats less than 16 feet in length, and canoes and kayaks of any length, must carry a Type I, II or III wearable life jacket of the appropriate size for each person on board.
- All boats 16 feet or over in length, except canoes and kayaks, must carry one wearable (Type I, II or III) of the appropriate size for each person on board and one throwable (Type IV) device in each boat.

Any person aboard a personal watercraft, or being towed behind a vessel on water skis, an aquaplane or similar device, must wear a Type I, II, III or V U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket.



A Type V life jacket may be carried in lieu of any wearable life jacket required, but only if the Type V is approved for the activity in which the boat is being used. A Type V hybrid life jacket must be worn in order to be acceptable.

Life jacket Types I, II and III must be “readily accessible.” This means they may not be kept inside a plastic bag or protective covering, they must be easy to reach, and must be stowed with the straps untied. All throwable life jackets (Type IV) must be “immediately available.” The law requires that they are kept in an open area where persons on board can reach them quickly in an emergency.

Besides being in good and serviceable condition, a life jacket must be of the appropriate size for the intended wearer and display a U.S. Coast Guard-approval number.

U.S. Coast Guard Approval

In order for a life jacket to meet legal requirements, it must be U.S. Coast Guard-approved. This approval is shown by a stencil marking or tag on the life jacket. The tag or marking shows the name and address of the manufacturer and the U.S. Coast Guard-approval number. It also shows the amount of the flotation device and the life jacket type (I, II, III, IV or V).

Life Jackets and Flotation Devices

TYPE I: Offshore Life Jacket ▶

- Intended for offshore boating as well as open water and coastal cruising
- Offers the most flotation and is the most effective life jacket in rough waters
- May help prevent hypothermia
- Designed to turn an unconscious wearer face up
- Bulky



◀ TYPE II: Near-Shore Buoyant Vest

- Intended for calm, inland water
- May turn unconscious wearer face up
- Good for non-swimmers
- Provides good flotation
- Less bulky than offshore vests



TYPE III: Children's Life Jacket ▶

- Intended for general recreational boating
- Designed for possible immersion
- May not turn unconscious wearer face up
- May have special safety features for children

TYPE III: Flotation Aids ▼

- Intended for fishing, hunting, canoeing, kayaking, water skiing, or other high-impact, high-speed activities
- Designed for possible immersion
- May not turn unconscious wearer face up
- Rugged construction



Manual Inflatable



Vest-Type Flotation Jacket

TYPE IV: Throwable Flotation Device ▶

- Intended to be thrown to someone who has fallen overboard
- Designed to be grasped and held by user until he or she is rescued



◀ TYPE V: Special Use Device

- Required to be worn for special uses or conditions
- Made for specific activities such as sail boarding and rafting
- Designed for use with deck suits, work vests, hybrid PFDs, and others as marked on the label
- Must follow Coast Guard label for limited use

TYPE III & V: Inflatable Life Jackets ▼

- Available in three types:
 - Hydrostatic (inflates automatically upon immersion or when manually activated)
 - Manual (only inflates when manually activated)
 - Belt Pack (only inflates when manually activated; must be placed over head once activated)
- Easy to wear, comfortable and cool
- Not intended for children under 16 or non-swimmers
- Not intended for sports activities where immersion is expected



Belt Pack Inflatable



Inflatable Vest before inflation

Inflatable Vest after inflation