



onCOURSE with the USCG AUXILIARY

Recently I was speaking to a group of sixth grade students on boating safety. The topic of discussion was the wearing of life jackets. Most of the young people in the class realized how important it was to wear a life jacket, but many commented that they don't wear them because they're ugly. Others indicated that no one else in their family did so they didn't have to either and still others stated that since they could swim, they didn't need to wear a life vest.



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The attitudes of these young people, of course, are a concern to all of us involved with safe boating education. But even more of a concern is that many adults, who act as role models for their children, hold many of the same attitudes. How many of you wear your **Personal Flotation Devices** (PFD) when out on the water? From the looks of things, I can say that I've very rarely seen a skipper or his guests wearing their PFDs. Even worse, how many people do you know that still have their PFDs in sealed plastic and stored under the front bunk or some other out of the way place on their boats?

According to the Coast Guard's boating accident fatality report, more people would be alive today if they had just done the responsible thing and worn their lifejackets. According to U.S. Coast Guard statistics, out of the nearly 700 recreational boating fatalities reported in a recent report, nearly 500 persons drowned. 87% of those were not wearing a lifejacket when the incident or mishap occurred. That means that over 400 lives could have been saved had they worn their PFDs. I think those numbers support a sobering and convincing argument for wearing a PFD whenever you are on the water.

The report also indicates that 57% of those fatalities were the result of capsizing or falls overboard. So much for storing your PFDs under the front bunk! Every passenger must have a PFD readily available and in an emergency the key word here is readily. Each time an Auxiliarist steps foot on a boat to go out on patrol, a PFD is worn. We never leave the dock until everyone has their PFD on. As a result, I've developed that good habit and now wear a PFD whenever I go out on the water. It is also important that whenever you wear a PFD that it fits properly. Whenever one of my guests would go out on my boat, they were always assigned a PFD (sized to fit them) and numbered so that they could easily grab the correct one should an emergency arise. Of course, my preference is that they wear the PFD at all times.

Fortunately for all of us, the boating industry offers more choices for personal flotation devices today than ever before. Today's PFDs are lighter, smaller and more comfortable than ever before. You'll also find one for any type of boating. My favorite, and the easiest to convince guests to wear is the inflatable model. When inflated its performance is equal to a Type I, II or III. Finally, take the time to inspect your PFDs.

They do wear out. Check out the local boating supply retailers for information on what's available and which PFD is best for you or ask a Coast Guard Auxiliarist. Our local Flotilla Commander can be reached at flotillacommander@a0130804.uscgaux.info. We may not have all of the answers at our fingertips, but we can sure get you an answer pretty quickly. After all we have all of the resources and people of the USCG and the USCG Auxiliary at our disposal!

Keep this catchy phrase from a recent PFD campaign in mind the next time you go out on the water. *Boating Smart from the start....wear a life jacket. It floats....you don't!*

If you would like additional information on personal floatation devices or the USCG Auxiliary, please visit our local website at <http://a0130804.uscgaux.info>.

See you on the water.