THE NATIONAL SAFE BOATING COUNCIL
8160 Flannery Court
Manassas, VA 20109
Phone: 703.361.4294
SAFEBOATINGCOUNCIL.ORG

FIT FACTS

The first sign of a rookie boater is someone who is wearing a life jacket that doesn’t fit! Choose a life jacket that fits properly.

• You don’t want your life jacket too large or too small. A snug fit is a proper fit.

• Make sure the life jacket is properly fastened and all straps, buckles, and zippers are secure and accessible.

• Hold your arms straight over your head and ask a friend to grasp the tops of the arm openings and gently pull up. If it doesn’t slip, it fits.

REMEMBER!

Life jackets for adults do not work for children.

WHAT IS A LIFE JACKET?

REQUIREMENTS

Most boaters know they’re required to have a U.S. Coast Guard approved wearable life jacket on board for every person on their boat. Boating safety advocates recommend all boaters and passengers not only have a life jacket, but wear it at all times while boating.

TODAY’S OPTIONS

Modern life jackets are more comfortable, lightweight and stylish than the bulky orange style of the past. Life jackets ... comfortable. They may resemble a pair of suspenders or a belt pack. Many inflate automatically when immersed in water.

READ THE LABEL

To choose a life jacket providing the right comfort and safety, you need to know how a life jacket works and how to read the label. Life jackets you may already own may have the old “type” life jacket label (Type I - Type V). This brochure explains the new life jacket label. The new label does not make obsolete life jackets with the old label (you can continue to use your life jacket as long as it is in good condition and appropriate for the activity).

KNOW YOUR NEWTONS

The performance level is measured in newtons. A lower level number offers more mobility, comfort, and style with good flotation, and intended for near shore (calm water) activities. The higher level number offers greater flotation, turning, and stability in the water. These are intended for offshore activity, and when more time is needed in rescue situations.

NEAR SHORE, OFFSHORE, BE SURE!

Remember, time to rescue is important. If your boating activity is near shore, your life jacket may be rated at 50 newtons. If you’re boating offshore, you would consider a life jacket with a 150 newtons rating. However, there are areas where you may be boating near shore when rescue is hours away and a higher level life jacket is needed.

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT LIFE JACKET

The National Safe Boating Council (NSBC) was organized in September 1958. The NSBC serves as a national catalyst for developing a safe boating culture by providing educational resources, outreach programming, and training opportunities for industry partners and the boating community to influence safe, secure, and responsible boating.

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WHICH LIFE JACKET IS RIGHT FOR ME?

Be honest about your swimming ability when selecting a life jacket. If you are a poor swimmer, you may opt for a higher performance level.

Boating offshore or in potentially rough water?
- Offshore Life Jacket
  - Designed to turn an unconscious person face-up
  - Brightly colored
  - Higher newton rating for more buoyancy

Fishing? Hunting? In cold water?
- Float Coat, Hunting or Fishing Vest
  - Designed for comfort and range of motion
  - Available in camouflage colors for waterfowl hunting
  - Plenty of pockets

Enjoying watercrafts or towing and water sports?
- Vest
  - Inherently buoyant
  - Close fitting
  - Multiple fasteners
  - Brightly colored
  - Designed for comfort and range of motion

Padding or sailing on near-shore waters and in-land waterways?
- Vest (or Inflatable)
  - Designed for comfort
  - Brightly colored
  - Inherently buoyant
  - Approved for the activity
  - Selected for comfort

Fishing? Hunting? In cold water?
- Float Coat, Hunting or Fishing Vest
  - Designed for comfort and range of motion
  - Available in camouflage colors for waterfowl hunting
  - Plenty of pockets

Boating with a child?
- Any Style Suited for Activity
  - Virtually all styles available are sized especially for children
  - Many include additional safety features such as straps for pulling children from the water

How about your four-legged friend?
- Pet Harness
  - A harness allows you to grab pet in the event of a submersion

WEAR IT
A program of the National Safe Boating Council

THERE ARE NO SEAT BELTS ON A BOAT
Accidents happen fast and allow for little time to reach and put on a stowed life jacket.

HOW TO CARE FOR YOUR LIFE JACKET

LIFE JACKETS CAN SERVE YOU FOR MANY YEARS IF THEY ARE PROPERLY STORED AND CARED FOR. YOU SHOULD:
- Use the life jacket for its intended purpose
- Dry life jackets completely after each use
- Hand wash with mild soap & water
- Store in a dry place when not boating
- Ensure the U.S. Coast Guard label is never removed and is legible

And, always refer to the label on your life jacket for specific maintenance requirements.

Serviceability
If your life jacket becomes torn or the buckles or zippers break, it’s time to get a new life jacket. You should also replace your life jacket if it becomes waterlogged or smells of mildew.

Inflatable
Inflatable Life Jackets use compressed air, or CO2 cartridges to inflate. Ensure you have the right cartridge for your jacket, check the cartridge for corrosion and always carry a spare rearming kit in the event of an unexpected inflation. Orally inflate to test that the jacket holds air for 16-24 hours.

“THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT SELECTING A LIFE JACKET IS CHOOSING ONE YOU WILL WEAR.”
Peg Phillips, Executive Director
National Safe Boating Council

NOTE ABOUT STATE LAWS

State laws vary, but real boaters always wear their life jacket.

On recreational boats underway, children under 13 years old must wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved life jacket unless they are below decks or in an enclosed cabin.

For more information, check with state marine law enforcement.