

Boating Safety Tips



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✓ Wear a Life Jacket

Life jackets (also referred to as Personal Flotation Devices, or PFDs) play a crucial part in any safe boating equation. In an accident, they are the single most important survival factor. In fact, according to the National Safe Boating Council, nearly 70 percent of all recreational boating victims die by drowning, and nearly 90 percent of the drowning victims weren't wearing life jackets.

You should have Coast Guard-approved life jackets on all recreational watercraft. One wearable PFD (Type I, II, III or IV) for each person on board. And if your boat is more than 16 feet in length, you should also have at least one throwable PFD (Type IV) on board.

- A **proper fit** is essential and one size does not fit all. Each life jacket must fit the person wearing it. A jacket fits properly if it does not slip over the head or come above the ears once the straps and buckles are secured.
- **Water toys** (such as inflatable inner tubes) should NEVER be used as a substitute for Coast Guard-approved life jackets.
- Life jackets should be in **good condition**. Replace a life jacket if the buckles or zippers fail to work properly.
- It's important to **check life jackets annually**, as well as every time they're used. You'll want to make sure they still float and correctly fit the intended users.
- **Pay close attention to children**. Life jackets are made to fit infants through pre-teens, so be sure that a child wears the correct size (weight and size information is listed on the label).

✓ **Pack a Personal Care Kit**

Assemble a personal care kit to keep on board at all times. This can help keep you safer and more comfortable in case of emergency. Supplies to include are:

- Sunscreen
- Sunglasses, hats and foul weather gear
- Binoculars
- Extra clothing for warmth (preferably wool)
- Food and water
- A supply of your prescription medications
- Reliable means to call for help (see below)

✓ **Have a Reliable Means to Call for Help**

Communication via VHF-FM radio provides superior alerting capabilities over cellular phones. When a MAYDAY is sent out via VHF-FM radio, it is a broadcast rather than just one party receiving the distress call. Any nearby boaters should be able to hear the distress call and offer immediate assistance.

✓ **File a Float Plan**

Keep in mind that weather conditions can quickly change, so check the forecast and water conditions before leaving. Bring along a radio to monitor weather reports while on the water. And pay attention to the sky – most weather changes come from the West.

Be sure to give the following information to a friend or relative who can call for help if you don't return as scheduled:

- A complete description of your watercraft (including registration number)
- The names of all persons on board
- Information regarding your destination
- Estimated return time
- Phone number of the local or state marine authorities

✓ **Avoid Alcohol**

Most people don't realize that the number one factor contributing to deadly boating accidents is alcohol. And surprisingly, it's not a drunk operator crashing into another boat or a dock that causes the majority of these tragedies. Most alcohol-related deaths result from passengers drowning, most often when boats are not moving at all.

That's why it's imperative that everyone on board avoids alcohol. Even one drink can impair judgment. Combined with the effects of being on the water – motion, noise and boat vibration, as well as wind and dehydration from the sun – this can be a recipe for disaster.

✓ **Know Your Boundaries**

Pay close attention to the placement of buoys. They're intended to keep you on course and out of hazardous areas. Buoys are identified by different shapes, colors, light and – in reduced visibility areas – by sounds, so you'll need to learn the meaning of each kind.

✓ **Take a Safe Boating Course**

The knowledge gained in training courses can help prevent boating accidents. That's why some insurance companies – including Allstate – offer discounts to qualified customers who successfully complete courses from the U.S. Coast Guard and other qualifying organizations.

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