

# Oregon State Marine Board



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## Life Jackets

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### Life Jackets (PFDs)

A life jacket, or personal flotation device (PFD), can save your life if you wear it. In Oregon, 90% of the people who drown in boating accidents would have survived -had they worn life jackets. For information on life jackets and other carriage requirements, [check here](#).



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### State Law

#### General:

All boats must carry at least one U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device (PFD) for every person aboard. Such devices must be in serviceable condition. They must not have any rips, tears, or broken straps. All devices must also be kept readily accessible for use in an emergency situation. Personal flotation devices in a plastic bag or in a storage compartment are not readily accessible.

Persons being towed are considered on board the towing boat and there must be an approved Type I, II, or III device aboard for each.

Children age 12 and under must wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket at all times while on an open deck or cockpit of vessels that are underway or when being towed. Inflatable PFD's are not approved for children.

#### State Law -Specific terms:

No person shall operate a boat on Oregon waters with a child age 12 and under unless the child is wearing a U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device (PFD)/life jacket, of the appropriate size, while the boat is underway. Children on an open deck or cockpit of sailboats, motorized and non-

motorized vessels (canoes, kayaks, rafts) underway must wear a life jacket at all times.

#### Exceptions:

- While child is below deck, or in an enclosed cabin of a boat.
- When the child is on a sailboat and tethered by lifeline or harness that is attached to the sailboat.
- When the child is on a U.S. Coast Guard-inspected passenger-carrying vessel operating in navigable waters of the U.S.



### Carriage Requirements

The number and type of life jackets you are required to carry depends on boat length and the number of persons on board.

- Boats less than 16 feet in length, and canoes and kayaks of any length, must carry one wearable Type I, II or III for each person on board, including water skiers. Under the new law, a water skier age 12 and under must wear a life jacket at all times.
- All boats 16 feet or longer, must carry one Type I, II, III or V for each person on board and one Type IV throwable in each boat. (\*Note - canoes and kayaks are exempt from carrying Type IV throwable flotation device.)
- A Type V PFD may be carried instead of any required PFD, but not on personal watercraft, and only if the Type V is approved for the activity for which the boat is being used. Most Type Vs must be worn to meet the carriage requirements.
- Anyone operating or riding a personal watercraft (Jet Skis, Wave Runners) must wear a Type I, II or III life jacket.
- A water skier must wear a PFD or have one on board the tow boat.



### Recommended Use

Infants, children and non-swimmers should wear life jackets at all times while on docks and other places near open water (ponds, lakes, creeks, rivers, pools). When boating in cold water, life jackets should be worn at all times. Cold water can numb extremities and limit reflexes quickly, making it difficult to put on a life jacket.



### Types of Life Jackets and How They're Used:

#### Type I Life Jacket



This device is intended for use offshore, in open or coastal waters, or potentially rough seas where a quick rescue may not be likely. Type I preservers have greater flotation value than other life jackets; they are designed to turn most unconscious wearers face-up in the water.

#### Type II Life Jacket



This vest is designed for use where rough water is unlikely, or a quick rescue is probable. Less buoyant than a Type I, this device will turn most unconscious wearers to a vertical or a slightly face-up position. It is not suitable for extended survival in rough or cold water.

#### Type III Life Jacket



This is a buoyant device intended for general or specialized boating where rough water is unlikely or where a quick rescue is available. A Type III is designed to provide a stable face-up position in calm water for a conscious person floating with head tilted back. Not intended to turn or maintain an unconscious wearer face-up.

#### Type IV Throwable Cushion

This type is designed to be thrown to someone overboard. A Type IV, cushion or ring buoy, should never be worn on the back. Using these devices in this manner will force a wearer's face under water. A Type IV is of little use to an unconscious or exhausted person and is not recommended for children or non-swimmers.



#### Type V Special Purpose Devices



Type V devices are designed and approved for restricted uses or activities such as commercial whitewater rafting. Most Type Vs need to be worn to meet legal PFD carriage requirements.

#### Infant/Child Life Jackets



An infant or child life jacket should have a crotch strap, which helps keep the life jacket on; an oversized float collar, which keeps the head out of the water; and a grab loop, which makes plucking a youngster out of the water easier.

The US Coast Guard does not recommend taking newborns below 18 pounds onboard a recreational boat unless the parent is able to test their newborns out in a PFD, sized for infants, in a swimming pool. Testing is the only way to ensure that the device will float the infant with his/her head out of the water. Unless you know the PFD you have works for your infant, why put the child at any risk.?

Infant life jackets can be hard to find. Check the large discount department stores like Walmart, Target, ShopKo, K-Mart, etc, or search online for "infant life jacket." Despite the difficulty of finding them, officers will cite if infants are not properly fitted. Here's a U.S. Coast Guard listing of [manufacturers that produce infant life jackets](#).

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### Hybrid and Inflatables

A hybrid inflatable contains a small amount of built-in flotation and an inflatable chamber. When fully inflated, its performance is equal to that of a Type I, II or III life jacket. To meet PFD carriage requirements, most hybrids need to be worn, except when the boat is not underway or when the boater is in an enclosed cabin or below deck. Hybrids and inflatables are not approved for children. The U.S. Coast Guard has approved fully inflatable life jackets that meet carriage requirements for recreational boats. Compact and comfortable, they are worn as a belt pack or as suspenders.

Note: Both hybrid and inflatable life jackets must be inspected in accordance with the instructions on the label. Some hybrids and inflatables utilize CO2 cartridges which need to be tested regularly. Expendable cartridges need to be replaced.

See various inflatable demonstration videos: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgo1RtOFbHs&feature=related>

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### Coast Guard Approval

Life jackets must be Coast Guard approved and the right size for the wearer. Coast Guard approval is shown by a stencil marking or tag on the PFD. The marking or tag shows the amount of flotation in the device and the PFD type. If your PFD or life jacket is damaged, it no longer meets legal requirements. Check your jackets yearly for buoyancy, rips, rust and rot.



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### Check for Proper Fit

Use the "touchdown test" to check if a life jacket fits.

With the jacket on, raise your arms as though signaling a touchdown. If when looking to the left, right and over the shoulder, the chest part of the jacket doesn't hit the chin, the device probably fits. A good test for children is to have a child stand normally, arms at sides. Grab the life jacket at the shoulders and firmly lift up. If you can move the life jacket more than three inches up and down the child's body, it doesn't fit.

A life jacket that doesn't fit could endanger the wearer as much as not wearing one. Check the PFD label for restrictions and limitations on its use and performance type.



### PFD's for Our Four-Legged Friends!

Dogs often accompany us on our excursions. Dozens of dogs are lost each year from drowning due to panic, exhaustion, and cold water immersion.

Because of this, Four Paws Only, has created "OPERATION SAFE DOG." Four Paws Only produces clothing and toys for dogs, and saw the need to expand to life jackets. The organization created a life jacket loaner program in the Portland-Metro area with hopes of expanding it statewide, and nationally.



The goals of the program are to:

- Encourage safety in and on the waters around Oregon by providing a life jacket for your dog.
- Life jackets are available on loan at the major gas docks on the Columbia and Willamette Rivers.
- The life jackets used in the program are the Paws Aboard brand. They are reflective, have a carrying handle and are durable, lightweight and bouyant.
- Operation Safe dog is sponsored by Four Paws Only and Paws Aboard and is encouraged by the Oregon State Marine Board and the Multnomah County River Patrol.

Take advantage of this great opportunity to safeguard your dog. In 2007, 50 dogs were saved in the Portland-Metro area by wearing life jackets.

For more information, visit [www.fourpawsonly.org](http://www.fourpawsonly.org).



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