



COAST GUARD  
FOUNDATION

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# BOATING SAFETY GUIDE



# BOATING SAFETY GUIDE

## YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

You can use this Boating Safety Guide to help minimize risk, injury, and property damage when using recreational boats. By filing a float plan\* and taking preventive measures, you can maximize safe use and enjoyment of your boating experience.

It is important to note that this guide covers only basic boating elements and does not guarantee the safety of your vessel or its passengers. Please refer to the U.S. Coast Guard for further safety guidelines and requirements for recreational boats.

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### United States Coast Guard Boating Safety

[www.uscgboating.org](http://www.uscgboating.org)

### Fire Protection Guide

[www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/10/22/2021-22578/fire-protection-for-recreational-vessels](http://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/10/22/2021-22578/fire-protection-for-recreational-vessels)

### United States Coast Guard Auxiliary

[www.cgaux.org](http://www.cgaux.org)

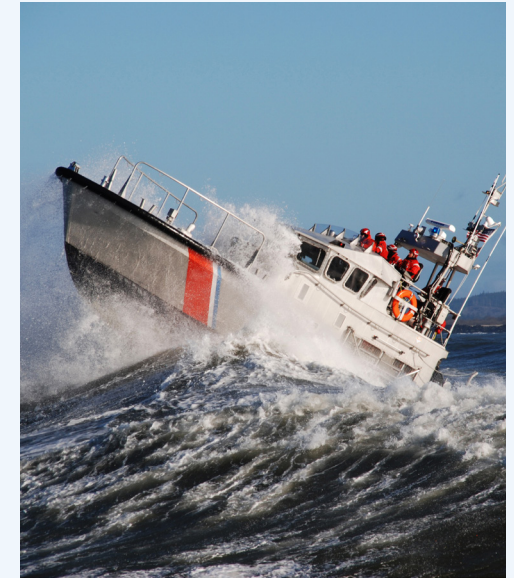
### Download the U.S. Coast Guard Mobile App

Your safe boating needs in one free easy app!



### INFORMATION SOURCE

- [coastguardfoundation.org/boatingsafetysource](http://coastguardfoundation.org/boatingsafetysource)
- [www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/10/22/2021-22578/fire-protection-for-recreational-vessels](http://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/10/22/2021-22578/fire-protection-for-recreational-vessels)



## The Coast Guard Foundation

provides essential services to our Coast Guard members and their families that support their health, fitness, and morale — services not covered by the military's budget. We rely on the generosity of friends like you to help these brave men and women be "always ready" to save lives and protect our shores.

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[coastguardfoundation.org/contribute](http://coastguardfoundation.org/contribute)

# LIFE JACKETS

## TYPES OF LIFE JACKETS

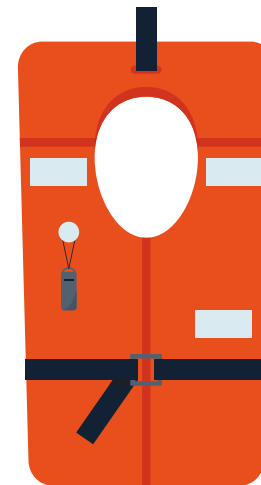
### Type I

A Type I, Off-Shore Life Jacket provides the most buoyancy. It is effective for all waters, especially open, rough, or remote waters where rescue may be delayed. It is designed to rotate an unconscious wearer to a face-up position in the water.



### Type II

A Type II, Near-Shore Buoyancy Vest is intended for calm, inland waters or where there is a good chance of quick rescue. This type of inflatable rotates as well as a Type I foam jacket and is for general boating activities. Inherently, buoyant life jackets of this type will rotate some unconscious wearers to a face-up position in the water, but the rotation is not as pronounced as with a Type I.



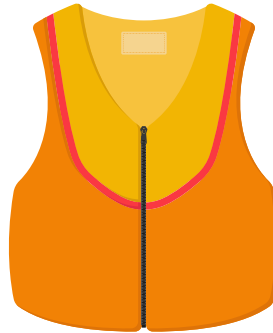
# LIFE JACKETS

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## TYPES OF LIFE JACKETS

### Type III

A Type III, Flotation Aid is good for users in calm, inland waters, or anywhere there is a good chance of quick rescue. The wearer must tilt their head back to remain in a face-up position. The Type III foam vest has the same minimum buoyancy as a Type II. Type III flotation aids are designed for specialized activities, such as water skiing, hunting, fishing, canoeing, and kayaking. This type of inflatable turns as well as a Type II foam vest.



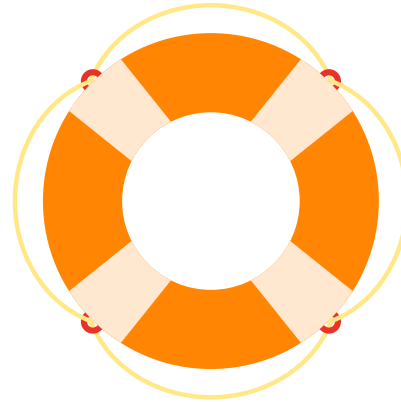
# LIFE JACKETS

(Continued)

## TYPES OF LIFE JACKETS

### Type IV

A Type IV, Throwable Device is intended for use anywhere. It is designed to be thrown to a person in the water and grasped and held by the user until rescued. It is not designed or intended to be worn. Type IV devices include buoyant cushions, ring buoys, and horseshoe buoys. There are no Coast Guard-approved inflatable Type IV devices.



# LIFE JACKETS

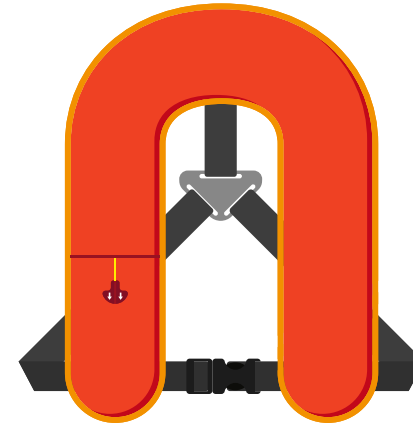
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## TYPES OF LIFE JACKETS

### Type V

A Type V, Special-Use Device is intended for specific activities and may be carried instead of another life jacket only if used according to the condition(s) for which it is approved, as shown on its label. A Type V provides the performance of a Type I, II, or III (as marked on its label). If the label says the life jacket is “approved only when worn,” the life jacket must be worn (except by persons in enclosed spaces) and used in accordance with the approval label to meet carriage requirements. Some Type V devices provide significant hypothermia protection. Special-use devices include hybrid inflatable personal flotation devices, canoe/kayak vests, boardsailing vests, deck suits, work vests for commercial vessels, commercial whitewater vests, man-overboard rescue devices, and law enforcement flotation devices.

An Inflatable with Safety Harness is approved only as a Type V, Special-Use Device because its use to prevent falls overboard presents several risks. The U.S. Coast Guard has not assessed its potential for injury from suddenly stopping a fall, and in case of capsizing or sinking, the boat may take the wearer down, resulting in death. Do not attach the harness to the boat unless it is being worn with a tether of less than 6.5 feet in length with quick-release-under-load hardware. Read the safety harness section of the owner’s manual for intended use. Under no circumstances should the safety harness be used for any climbing activity. U.S. Coast Guard approval does not apply to this harness if used under those circumstances.



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# LIFE JACKETS

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## FINDING THE RIGHT LIFE JACKET FOR YOU

Life jackets come in many designs, colors, styles, and materials. Some are made to stand up to rugged water sports, others to protect the wearer from cold-water temperatures. Be sure to choose one that is appropriate for your body size, planned activities, and the water conditions you expect to encounter.



**WEAR YOUR LIFE JACKET.  
WHEN YOU DON'T,  
YOU'RE RISKING YOUR LIFE.**

### Test the Fit

Start with a life jacket that is U.S. Coast Guard-approved. Try it on. It should fit comfortably snug. Then give it this test: with all straps, zippers, and ties securely fastened, raise your arms over your head. The jacket should stay in place and not ride up. Next, have someone lift your life jacket straight up at the shoulders. Again, the jacket should stay in place. If the zipper touches your nose or the jacket almost comes off, it is too loose.

### Test the Buoyancy of Your Life Jacket

In shallow water or a swimming pool, under supervision and with all straps, zippers, and ties fastened, see how the life jacket floats you. Relax your body and let your head tilt back. Your chin should remain above water so that you can breathe easily. If not, you may need a different size or model, one that provides more buoyancy.

### Choosing a Child's Life Jacket

Be sure to choose a child's life jacket that is U.S. Coast Guard-approved. Check to make sure your child's weight falls within the range shown on the label. While some children in the 30-50 pound weight range who can swim may ask for the extra freedom of movement that a Type III provides, note that most children in this weight range, especially those who cannot swim, should wear a Type II. To check for a good fit, pick the child up by the shoulders of the life jacket. If it fits correctly, the child's chin and ears will not slip through. A child's life jacket should be tested in the water immediately after purchase. Children may panic when they fall into the water suddenly. Float testing not only checks the fit and buoyancy, but also provides an important opportunity to teach them to relax in the water.

### Be Safe: Wear Your Life Jacket

Most deaths from drowning occur near shore in calm weather, not out at sea during a storm; 9 out of 10 drowning fatalities occur in inland waters, most within a few feet from safety.

# MARKERS & SYMBOLS

These orange-and-white aids are used to alert vessel operators to various warnings and regulations.

## SYMBOL

## MEANING

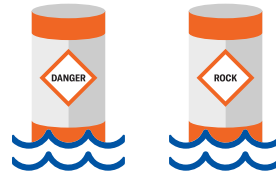
## EXAMPLE

## CHARACTERISTICS



### Danger

A diamond shape alerts boaters to hazards

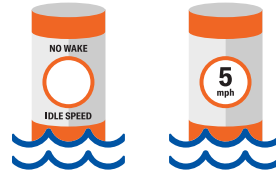


- White with an orange horizontal band at both top and bottom
- Black text within or around an orange square, circle, or diamond, or black text outside a diamond with an orange cross
- May be buoys or beacons
- If lit, the light will be white and may have any light rhythm except quick flashing or Morse code "A"



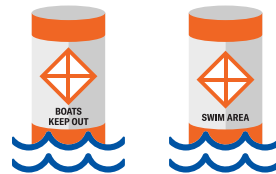
### Restricted Operations

Marks with a circle indicate areas with regulated operations



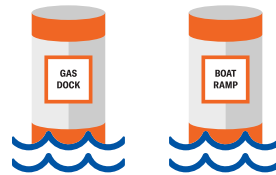
### Exclusion

A diamond shape with a cross means boats are prohibited from the area



### Information

Marks with a square provide helpful information such as directions, distances, and locations



# SAFETY & SURVIVAL TIPS

## SAFE BOATING EDUCATION

Training is important for boaters of all experience levels, but especially for the beginning boater. In a typical year, approximately 70% of accidents involving fatalities occur on boats where the boat operator has had no formal instruction on how to operate the vessel. As a result, more than half of all states have enacted legislation mandating boater safety education as a requirement for boat operators.

## BOATING SAFETY IS NO ACCIDENT

To further develop your boating knowledge, proficiency, and confidence, take a boating safety course.

To locate local course offerings, or for more information on recreational boating and boating safety, contact your state boating agency, U.S. Coast Guard District office, or the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary website at [www.cgaux.org](http://www.cgaux.org).

## ENGINE CUT-OFF SWITCH

Using the Engine Cut-Off Switch (ECOS) link, which is required by a federal law effective on April 1, 2021, is vital to preventing injuries and deaths if a boat operator loses control of the boat. This includes situations where the operator is ejected, which typically leads to a runaway boat. When this happens, anyone in the water is at risk of a propeller strike, and nearby boats become collision hazards. Wearing the cut-off switch link immediately stops the engine and allows the operator to regain control of the boat.

This requirement applies to any motorized boat that is less than 26 feet in length, equipped with an engine larger than 2-3 horsepower, and was built after January 2020. If the boat's primary helm is inside an enclosed cabin, it is not required to have a cut-off switch. The cut-off switch link doesn't need to be attached when the vessel is idling or performing docking maneuvers. The link must be attached to the operator whenever the boat is operating on plane or greater than displacement speed.



## PROPELLER BLADE WARNING

Never forget the danger to persons in the water and injuries that boat propellers can inflict. Most propeller injuries and fatalities involve open motorboats from 16 to 25 feet in length and result from operator inattention, inexperience, or carelessness.

**BE ALERT!** Remember to shut off your engines when approaching swimmers or other persons in the water. Keep those in the water on the operator's side of the boat, always in view. Propeller guards are helpful, but are not suitable for all types of boats. The best and safest action when people are in the water near your boat is to shut off your engines.

# SAFETY & SURVIVAL TIPS

(Continued)

## WEATHER

You should never leave the dock without first checking the local weather forecast. While you are out in a boat, here are a few signs you can look for that indicate an approaching weather change:

- Flat clouds getting lower and thicker
- Puffy, vertically rising clouds getting higher
- Dark, threatening clouds, especially to the west/ southwest
- A sudden drop in temperature
- A halo around the sun or moon
- Increasing wind or a sudden change in wind direction
- Flashes on the horizon
- Seas becoming heavy
- Heavy AM radio static, which can indicate nearby thunderstorm activity

If you have a barometer on board, check it every two to three hours. A rising barometer indicates fair weather and a rise in wind velocity; a falling barometer indicates rain approaching.



## WHAT TO DO IN SEVERE WEATHER

- Reduce speed, keeping just enough power to maintain headway.
- Make sure everyone on board is wearing their life jacket.
- Turn on your running lights.
- If possible, head for the nearest shore that is safe to approach.
- Head the boat into the waves at a 45 degree angle.
- Keep the bilges free of water.
- Seat any passengers on the bottom of the boat, near the center line.
- If the engine fails, trail a sea anchor from the bow of the boat to keep it headed into the waves (a bucket can work as a sea anchor in an emergency.)
- Anchor the boat, if necessary.

# SAFETY & SURVIVAL TIPS

(Continued)

## STAYING AFLOAT

If the boat capsizes or you fall overboard, follow these rules to stay afloat:

- Remain calm: do not thrash about or try to remove clothing or footwear. It is a common belief that persons dressed in heavy clothing or waders will sink immediately if they fall overboard. This is not true. Air trapped in clothing provides considerable flotation, and bending the knees will trap air in waders, providing additional flotation. Thrashing in the water leads to exhaustion and increases the loss of air that keeps you afloat.
- If you are wearing a life jacket, keep it on.
- Keep your knees bent.
- Float on your back and paddle slowly to safety.

## COLD-WATER SURVIVAL

Sudden immersion in cold water can induce rapid, uncontrolled breathing, cardiac arrest, and other physical conditions that can result in drowning. In an unexpected plunge or in situations where you must enter cold water, here are a few guidelines to follow:

- Button up your clothing.
- Cover your head if possible; about 50% of body heat is lost from the head.
- If entering the water voluntarily, enter slowly.
- Keep your head out of the water if possible.
- If you cannot immediately get out of the water and rescue is not imminent, draw your knees to your chest and wrap your arms across your chest, hugging your life jacket in the Heat Escape Lessening Posture (H.E.L.P.). This will protect the major areas of your body from heat loss.
- If your boat has capsized and there are others in the water with you, huddle together with your arms around each other. These huddles are good for morale, keeping everyone together, and making a larger target to spot in the water – all of which increase your chances of being seen and rescued.

## HYPOTHERMIA

Immersion in cold water speeds the loss of body heat and can lead to hypothermia. Hypothermia is the abnormal lowering of internal body temperature. If your vessel capsizes, it will likely float on or just below the surface. Outboard-powered vessels built after 1978 are designed to support you even if full of water or capsized. To reduce the effects of hypothermia, get in or on the boat. Try to get as much of your body out of the water as possible. Even if you do not get in the boat, a life jacket will enable you to keep your head out of the water. This is important because about 50% of body heat loss is from the head.



*H.E.L.P. Position*

# SAFETY & SURVIVAL TIPS

(Continued)

## FIRE EXTINGUISHER REGULATIONS

New Coast Guard fire extinguisher regulations, which went into effect on April 20, 2022, require that disposable (non-rechargeable) fire extinguishers must be replaced 12 years after the manufacture date. You can find the manufacture date stamped on the bottom of the extinguisher or near the UL label (for example: 09 or 2009).

- **Boats with a model year of 2018 or newer:** Must carry newer 5-B, 10-B, and 20-B classified extinguishers. The number in the new labels refers to the size of a potential fire (in square feet) that the extinguisher is designed to extinguish.
- **Boats with a model year of 2017 or older:** May carry an older B-I or B-II disposable extinguisher until their 12-year expiration date. After that time, they must be replaced with newer-class extinguishers.

## REQUIRED FIRE EXTINGUISHER BY LENGTH OF VESSEL

Length	No Fixed System	With Approved Fixed Systems
26' or less	One 5-B or One 10-B	0
26-40'	Two 5-B or Two 10-B or One 20-B	One 5-B or One 10-B
40-65'	Three 5-B or Three 10-B, or One 20-B and One 5-B, or One 10-B	Two 5-B or Two 10-B or One 20-B