

Newspaper Article 11: Life Jackets

Just one purpose for these little darlin's. To keep you from drowning! A just purpose and they really do their job.

Most of us, with any age on at all, remember pictures of the Titanic and other maritime disasters, where passengers put on large, bulky life jackets. They were so cumbersome that they were stored aboard ship and passed out (at least, to the lucky ones) just before the sinking!

Things have changed! Today's recreational boaters' life jackets are light weight, not bulky, good looking and comfortable to wear. Yeah, they are also inexpensive. It's only the purpose that hasn't changed – they still save our lives.

Let me bore you with some statistics:

In 2006 there were 710 boating deaths in our country;
472 of these died by drowning;
426 of those were NOT wearing life jackets.

That states my case – you will dramatically reduce your risk of dying from a boating accident if you are wearing your like jacket. While there is some movement to mandate the wearing of live jackets, it will probably remain a 'boater's choice' for some time. While only you – the Captain and Crew – will make that choice, just know that to err on the side of caution is not a bad thing to do. And then there are some federal and state laws about what we must do.

The law. For most of our boats, it is mandatory that we "carry aboard and have ready for use" one Coast Guard Approved life jacket for each person on board. The jackets must be in good condition and of the proper 'fit' for each of your passengers. Small ones for small folks and standard ones for the rest of us

In addition, we need to have one throwable device. This can be a floatable cushion with handles on two ends. The throwable must also be Coast Guard approved.

Children aboard have somewhat stricter rules. In South Carolina, children under 12 years old must wear an approved, and of the proper size, life jacket when on a boat less than 16 feet long. In Georgia, the law states that children under 10 years old must wear an approved and proper-sized life jacket while on board any moving vessel. (Except when the child is in a fully enclosed cabin, wearing of the jacket is waived.)

I know what you're thinkin! Our lake is split right down the middle between the two states. Not to worry. Our DNRs and Corps of Engineer folks tend to grant reciprocity on our lake. Just make sure you are following the rules for the state in which your boat is registered.

There is a great variety of life jackets on the market. Pricewise they range from about \$10 to over \$200. The most important consideration is what kind of boating you do and where you do it. Let's just keep this discussion to our lake.

The Type II jacket that fits over your head and ties around your waist is not only inexpensive but is a good jacket for our lake. The one I prefer, however, is called an inflatable. It has lots of buoyancy (that means how high it will raise you above the water) and comes in two varieties: 1) automatic, which inflates itself when it gets wet, and 2) the manual type which requires you to pull a lanyard to inflate. The automatic ones are much more expensive – which is why I have the manual one. (They seem to be priced around \$70) But, take care of them and they will last a lifetime.

Other than being an excellent jacket, the inflatables are easily worn all the time. Once you put one on you probably won't know it's there. Which reminds me of the old saw that the best life jacket for you is the one you'll wear!