

RECREATIONAL BOATING: Stay Safe on the Water



TAKE A BOATING SAFETY COURSE

Get to know the basics before you hit the water, from handling a boat to reading the weather. You can find a boating safety course nearby wherever you live.

GET A VESSEL SAFETY CHECK

The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and the United States Power Squadron, a nonprofit maritime educational organization, perform free vessel safety checks. Failing comes with no penalties — the goal is to help people boat safely.

WEAR A LIFE JACKET

The U.S. Coast Guard requires boats to have a life jacket for each person on board. Every state has separate regulations for life jackets worn by children. Make sure to test life jackets every year for wear and buoyancy. Discard them if they leak.

CHECK YOUR EQUIPMENT

Aside from life jackets, make sure other safety equipment, like a fire extinguisher and boat lights, are in good working order before leaving the dock. Keep emergency supplies like a map, flares and a first aid kit in a floating pouch. Toss your cell phone in there too for safekeeping.

CREATE A FLOAT PLAN

Every boater needs a float plan with details about the vessel, who is on board and the trip itinerary. Complete the plan and share it electronically with someone on land who can notify the Coast Guard or another rescue agency if you don't return or check in as planned.

INSTALL A CARBON MONOXIDE ALARM

Engine exhaust creates the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning, especially in areas where fresh air doesn't circulate. Install and maintain carbon monoxide alarms inside your boat. Watch for symptoms that seem like seasickness, which could also be the result of CO poisoning. If someone is displaying symptoms, get them into fresh air quickly.

NEVER BOAT UNDER THE INFLUENCE

A third of all recreational boating fatalities involve alcohol, according to the Coast Guard. Federal law prohibits boating under the influence. Penalties can include fines and jail time.

WEAR A LANYARD

An engine cut-off switch lanyard ties a boat driver's wrist to the controls, so if they're thrown overboard, the engine will shut off, protecting the driver and others from possible propeller accidents while traveling.

GET COVERED

Boat insurance can help protect your finances in the event of damage to a vessel, whether it's a fishing boat or a yacht. Many insurers let you bundle boat insurance with home and auto policies.

KNOW THE LAW

Every state has its own boating laws covering everything from education requirements to blood alcohol limits. The National Association of State Boating Laws has a guide to state laws on its website. (www.nasbla.org)



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Children and Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs)



Children need to wear PFDs whenever they are around the water. They also need to be taught how to properly wear a PFD and get used to wearing one.

Understandably, children often panic when they suddenly fall into the water. Panicking can make it difficult for the child to float face up, even when wearing a PFD. So, children should get used to wearing a PFD in the water before heading out on vessel.

It's also critical that a child's life jacket fit properly; careful consideration must always be given when choosing an infant or child-sized PFD. After buying a PFD, you'll also want to test the fit in safe and shallow water.

How Should a Life Jacket Fit a Child?

The fit must be snug enough that the child must not be able to slip out of the life jacket

Life jackets for infants and smaller children (less than 50 pounds) should have a crotch strap to ensure a snug fit, as well as a large float collar for head support. A good way to test a child's life jacket is to pick the child up by the shoulders of the PFD. If you've got the right fit, the PFD will not slip above the child's chin and ears. Before buying a life jacket for a child, always check the user label. The user label will indicate the weight range for which the life jacket is approved.

Children's life jacket requirements vary from state to state, however, federal law requires that all children under the age of 13 wear a life jacket on a moving boat.

The only exceptions to this rule are if the child is below deck, in an enclosed cabin, or if the boat is not underway.

Remember that there are state-specific regulations that remain applicable. So check the regulations for your area before going boating with a child on board.

Here are some tips for selecting a child's PFD:

First, take into account the child's swimming ability. Children who are not swimmers should wear a Type 2 child vest, which has greater buoyancy than a Type 3 PFD.

Consider the child's age and experience level around the water.

Teach the child how to relax and float in the water wearing a PFD.

Choose the right type of PFD for the activity.

And, always check to make sure that the size is appropriate for the child's weight.

Finally, remember that a child's PFD or life jacket is never a substitute for proper adult supervision.

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