

## Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries

# Personal Flotation Device (Life Jackets)

**Nearly all boating-related fatalities are the result of drowning and most of these fatalities could have been prevented if a life jacket was worn.**

There must be one wearable (Type I, II, III, or V) USCG approved life jacket for each person on the boat. The life jacket must be the appropriate size for each intended wearer.

- Each wearable life jacket needs to be "readily accessible." Readily accessible means the life jackets are stowed where they can be easily reached, or are out in the open ready for wear. Readily accessible life jackets cannot be in protective coverings or under lock and key.

In addition to the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries Rules, **PERSONAL FLOATATION DEVICE MUST BE WORN AT ALL TIMES IN OR ON ALL TOWN OWNED WATERCRAFT RENTED OR USED FROM THIS FACILITY.**

- In addition, you should check each life jacket for proper fit. This is especially important for children. Check the "Does Your Life Jacket Really Fit?" section.
- A Type V life jacket needs to be worn according to the manufacturer label to meet safety requirements.
- This requirement applies to all boats including paddlecraft (canoes, kayaks, and stand-up paddleboards).

## Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries

# Personal Flotation Device

# Serviceable Condition

All life jackets must be in good and serviceable condition. A life jacket that displays any of the following is not in good condition:

- Metal or plastic hardware used to secure the life jacket on the wearer that is broken, deformed, or weakened by corrosion; or
- Webbing or straps used to secure the life jacket on the wearer that are ripped, torn, or which have become separated from an attachment point on the life jacket; or
- Any other rotted or deteriorated structural component that fails when tugged; or
- Rips, tears, or open seams in fabric or coatings, that are large enough to allow the loss of buoyant material; or
- Buoyant material that has become hardened, non-resilient, permanently compressed, waterlogged, oil-soaked, or which shows evidence of fungus or mildew; or
- Loss of buoyant material or buoyant material that is not securely held in position.

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# Personal Flotation Device Inflatable Life Jackets

Inflatable Life Jackets must meet all the requirements for life jackets listed above plus the following:

- A properly armed inflation mechanism, complete with a full inflation cartridge and all status indicators showing that the inflation mechanism is properly armed;
- Inflatable chambers that are all capable of holding air;
- Oral inflation tubes that are not blocked, detached, or broken;
- Inflation status indicators that are not broken or otherwise non-functional;
- The inflation system of an inflatable life jacket need not be armed when the life jacket is worn inflated and otherwise meets the requirements above.

Federal Life Jacket Rule for Children Under 13 Years Old—No person may operate a recreational vessel on federal waters with any child under age 13 on the vessel unless each child is either:

- Wearing an appropriate life jacket approved by the Coast Guard; or
- Below deck or in an enclosed cabin.

In Virginia, this rule is enforced by the U.S. Coast Guard or other federal agents and applies on waters over which they have enforcement jurisdiction. Most waters in Virginia are considered federal waters.

In addition to the Federal Life Jacket Rule, **PERSONAL FLOATATION DEVICE MUST BE WORN AT ALL TIMES IN OR ON ALL TOWN OWNED WATERCRAFT RENTED OR USED FROM THIS FACILITY.**

### **A Special Note about Inflatable Life Jackets**

Inflatable life jackets are lightweight, comfortable to wear and take up about onetenth the storage room of conventional foam-filled life jackets. Most are USCG approved only for persons 16 years of age and older who are not engaged in white - water or skiing activities or riding on PWC. They are a great choice for adults on the water!

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# Personal Flotation Device Life Jacket Fit

### Does Your Life Jacket Really Fit?

- How do you know if a life jacket really fits you? First, check the label to make sure the life jacket is U.S. Coast Guard approved. Life jackets (or PFDs) come in a couple of basic sizes: infant, child, and adult. Within those basic sizes, there will be a range (Small, Medium, Large, etc.) of sizes. The label will indicate the basic size and the size range, which will include a weight range and usually also a chest size range. After you check the label, make sure you move on to the second step, try it on! Before every boating season, try on your life jacket. Make sure that it fits correctly. What does a correct fit mean? It should be snug, but not tight. Lift your arms over your head, can you turn your head left, right, and over your shoulder or has the life jacket ridden up and is in the way of moving your head? For a child, have them stand with their arms to their sides. Lift the life jacket up by the shoulders. The life jacket should not move more than 3 inches, no higher than the child's ears. If the life jacket does move up more than 3 inches, it is too big and the child can slip right out—get a smaller life jacket! A younger child's life jacket should also include a crotch strap—this will help insure the life jacket stays on. Finally, practice using the life jacket in shallow water. Make sure it is snug enough to stay put and not ride up over the chin and ears when in shallow water. Have children practice in shallow water with their life jacket so they don't panic in case of emergency.