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**Personal Flotation Devices in Recreational
Boating**

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Title: Mandatory Wear of Personal Flotation Devices on
Recreational Boats

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Mandatory Wear of Personal Flotation Devices on Recreational Boats
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The topic of mandatory wear of personal flotation devices has been quite controversial amongst constituents of the recreational boating safety community. There have been two public forums sponsored by the United States Coast Guard, one at the Miami Boat Show, February 14, 2004 and another at the International Boating and Water Safety Summit in Panama City Beach, Florida, April 18-21, 2004.. And although both concentrated on exploring means for increasing life jacket wear, the topic of mandatory wear arose several times.

The Mandatory wearing of personal flotation devices has been in effect for quite sometime now. Currently PFDs are required to be worn by the following: [refer to the attached charts that detail these mandatory wear requirements]

- *41 states and US territories for Tow-Behind activities such as water skiing, wake boarding, tubing, knee boarding, etc*
- *53 states and US territories for Personal Watercraft riding and operation*
- *46 states and US territories for Youth with*
 - *34 states and US territories at age points 14 and Younger, Under 13, Twelve and Under, Under 12, 11 and Younger*
 - *6 states and US territories at age points Under 10, Ten and Under, Under 8*
 - *6 states and US territories at age points Under 7, Under 6, Five and Under*

Additionally, some states mandate PFDs be worn for “hazardous conditions/ locations” or specific craft/events. [Reference Guide to State Boating Laws...Sixth Edition]:

<i>State/Territory</i>	<i>Hazardous conditions/locations; specific craft/events</i>
<i>Alabama</i>	<i>Within 800 feet below a hydroelectric dam or navigational lock</i>
<i>Colorado</i>	<i>All persons aboard outfitters vessels</i>
<i>Connecticut</i>	<i>Canoeists-October 1to May 31</i>
<i>Georgia</i>	<i>In designated "Hazardous area"</i>
<i>Maryland</i>	<i>Certain whitewater rivers at designated times</i>
<i>Massachusetts</i>	<i>Canoeists/kayakers at designated times</i>
<i>New Mexico</i>	<i>All persons in boat races, kayaks, canoes, and rubber rafts</i>
<i>Pennsylvania</i>	<i>Sailboards</i>
<i>Tennessee</i>	<i>Below dams in the areas marked</i>
<i>Utah</i>	<i>All boaters on rivers except in flat water areas</i>
<i>US Virgin Islands</i>	<i>Canoeists, kayakers, wind surfers, boat races</i>

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Based upon the National PFD Wear Rate Observational Study, 2003 conducted by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc., these mandates have been very effective in producing high percentages of PFD wear.

- *Among youth and adults, water skiing is the activity that has the greatest effect on PFD use, 73.5% and 21.5% respectively. [page 27]*
- *The PWC wear rate is 94.8% for adults defined as above 18 years old [page 20]*
- *The Wear rate for children 0-5 years old is 91.0% while for 6-12 year olds, the wear rate is 80.1% [page one]*

Based upon the latest published boating statistics for 2002 by the United States Coast Guard, these mandates have been very effective in saving lives as well.

- *2.8% of the total fatalities were PWC drownings*
- *2.67% of the total fatalities were Water-skiing/Tubing fatalities*
- *3.7% of the total fatalities were children Under 13*

However, it should be noted that nearly 40% of the children who perished in 2002 were not wearing a PFD and 67% of the reported PWC drownings were not wearing a PFD either. So despite existing mandatory wear laws, consumers do not comply with these laws.

Does this lack of 100% compliance negate the effectiveness of these laws? Dissenters of mandatory wear will certainly point to this fact as a justification for not pursuing such action, but from a pure statistical point of view, such laws produce high percentages of PFD wear with low percentages of drowning fatalities, therefore, it appears logical and reasonable to seriously consider mandating the wearing of PFDs by the recreational boating community.

- *After all, 70% of all fatal boating accident victims drowned and nearly 85% of these victims were not wearing their PFD. Overall fatal accident data shows approximately 440 lives could have been saved if boaters had worn their life jackets.*

Nevertheless compliance to mandatory wear laws cannot be ignored when considering such a regulation. What should be a reasonable expectation for boater compliance? **To answer this question thoroughly, it is my professional opinion additional research needs to be conducted about boaters attitudes about PFD usage, their personal mind set about PFD wear, and their objections to mandating PFDs be worn.**

It should be noted, however, that some effort has been made toward this end. The First Observational PFD Wear Rate Study conducted by NASBLA in 1997 used law enforcement officers as data collectors. 88% of the collected data resulted from vessel boardings whereby the boat operators and passengers were interviewed face to face. Quite frankly, one of the questions inquired about the swimming ability of the passengers in hopes to collect data that could shed some light of whether the lack of swimming ability prompted a boater to wear a PFD

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or whether their swimming skills deterred them from wearing a PFD. Unfortunately due to some unforeseen problems in computer programming the hand written data, it was impossible for the statistician on this project to statistically validate this attitude.

Nonetheless there was anecdotal evidence supporting the following conclusions:

- ***When children are present in the boat, particularly for cruising, an adult will most likely wear a PFD. Typically they cite “setting a good example” as their motive for wearing. Other factors include being embarrassed by their children to wearing one when they are required to wear one or being pressured by their spouse to wear a PFD since she was wearing one.***
- ***When adults take their children fishing, however, even with child mandatory wear laws in place, the adult will not insist the child wear a PFD and of course the adult does not wear one either.***
- ***When both adults and children operate a boat in offshore water or on intercoastal waterways, both adults and children wear PFDs. Typically the adult voiced concerns about the rough water conditions for both locations as factors influencing their choice to wear a PFD.***

With respect to consumer attitude and usage of PFDs, it should be noted that a limited qualitative research study was conducted by Dupont Fibers in 1996-1997 through Balistreri Consulting, Inc. and the Clowes Partnership Group to assess consumer use of life jackets, their habits, practices, perceptions, and preference about jackets amongst water skiers and wake boarders in two different age ranges, 15-17 year olds and 18-24 year olds, Personal Watercraft operators and riders, both male and female and boat owners with at least one child under the age of 12 years. A total of 81 respondents participated in the 10 Mini-Focus Group discussions.....42 in the Tampa Bay area and 39 in San Diego. Three distinct views of life jackets emerged from this study.

As a Swimming Aid: In recreational sail or power boating, parents insist on young children wearing PFDs. However, they seem to view the life jacket as more of an aid for inexperienced swimmers rather than a life saving device. Most feel the life jacket can be discarded as the child develops into a more proficient swimmer.

As a Crisis Aid: Boating parents and other boaters generally do not wear life jackets themselves when on board. The rationale seems to be that they know how to swim and, if a crisis should occur, a PFD is “available.”

As a Safety Net: Those who are actively participating in a water sport (either water skiing or being towed or riding/driving a PWC) are the most motivated wearers of PFDs. They are most familiar with the consequences of not wearing a jacket...both from the perspective of law enforcement/fines and personal safety concerns.

The younger respondents in these Groups (specifically teens) were more committed to the importance of wearing PFDs. This commitment seemed to be the result of parental training where wearing had been mandatory, from the sport itself or as a result an incident while skiing or wake boarding. However, even these younger respondents who were committed to wearing jackets when participating in water sports discarded the PFD when riding or driving in the tow boat.

In addition to accidents, water sport participants pointed to crowded boating conditions and reckless driving, including driving under the influence as reasons to wear a PFD. Some respondents indicated that wearing a PFD allowed them to push themselves physically without experiencing fear of injury. Correspondingly, these respondents avoided thinking about the possibility of an accident or emergency; they believed if they didn't think about it, then it wouldn't happen.

Boat owners with at least one child under the age of 12 years viewed PFDs for themselves as cumbersome and uncomfortable to wear, and simply something they didn't need to wear unless there was an emergency. From their personal experience in having their children in PFDs, they described PFDs as being too cold when wet after swimming, rode-up because of poor fit, chafed their child around the neck and under arms, were cumbersome and restricted movement.

These same boat owners did not take the child with them when they purchased a PFD; they used the weight ranges almost exclusively to predict a proper fit and viewed Coast Guard approval as a given believing a device could not be sold without it.

Regarding laws for PFDs, boat owners with at least one child under the age of 12 years exhibited a **general awareness of the law governing the availability of PFDs, however, few seemed to know the specifics about mandatory wear** despite the fact the respondents lived in states (California and Florida) that had such a law in effect at the time of this study. Typically this respondent learned about such laws from the boat dealer or marine equipment seller, acquaintances or from observing the law being enforced.

Regardless of the age or water sports, there was a **general lack of knowledge about the different life jacket types.** They were viewed as equal in terms of performance with only price, style, fit and color as distinguishing one from the other. Some respondents **believed the "Type" listed by the Coast Guard was a rating system** with a Type I being the "best", a Type V being the "worst" and a Type III being the best choice since it was in the middle and typically reflected better quality features.

The Dynamic Strength speed marking on the PFD was seen by water sports participants as providing personal protection at the designated speed. As such, the higher the speed the more protection the wearer received. Additionally one or two respondents spoke of a rating system for life jackets which combined the Coast Guard PFD type and the dynamic strength speed marking. For example, several respondents stated a "III-50" provides superior protection compared to a "II-35".

Only a few respondents recalled seeing a TV commercial promoting the wearing of a PFD. The majority of respondents relied upon store personnel, friends and relatives for PFD safety information. **During the simulated buying experience, only 10% read the PFD label; none of the respondents read the attached THINK SAFE pamphlet.**

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Over the years there have been times when the boating safety community was convinced a particular type of PFD would be the sole factor for increasing life jacket wear. During standards development meetings in the early 1980's for the Hybrid PFD (combination of foam and inflation) it was widely believed that products made to this standard would rival the Type II Near Shore buoyant vest in sales and cost. In 1986 the first hybrid was USCG approved and offered to the consumer. Due to a lack of consumer acceptance, within three years it was no longer being made.

More recently, the NPRM stated that approving Inflatable PFDs would reduce total boating fatalities to less than 400 by 2007. Since 1998, boating fatalities steadily declined, however, in 2002 they increased to 750 from 681 in 2001 and then decreased to 701 in 2003. Totally inflatable PFDs have been available to the consumer since 1998, and may be influential to the decline as described, however, based these totals, it would appear the stated goal of less than 400 fatalities in 2007 due to the wearing of inflatable PFDs will not be realized.

Nor has the introduction of the totally inflatable device dramatically impacted the Overall Mean PFD Wear Rates. In fact, it would appear the introduction of the inflatable PFD has made no difference in PFDs being worn at all. As per the National PFD Wear Rate Observational Study, 2003, the overall mean PFD Wear Rates Excluding PWC's were:

***17.7% in 1998, the very first year inflatables were commercially available,
15.6% in 1999, 18.3% in 2000, 17.0% in 2001, 16.5% in 2002 and 18.0% in 2003***

The above percentages were used based upon data excluding PWCs since inflatable PFDs are not approved for PWC riding or operation.

Relying solely upon one product to affect a major behavioral change in today's recreational boater is myopic. It is far more prudent for the boating safety community to rely upon the USCG approval process. This process can most assuredly produce consumer responsive PFDs that address specific boating environments, high energy water sports activities, distinct boating location and/or anatomical features or sizing needs of various boaters.

When such products can comply with existing standards, the approval process is relatively simple; the primary motivating factor being the economic return to the manufacturer of approval, manufacturing and shipping costs. When creating consumer responsive product does not easily comply with existing product standards, however, this process is far more complicated and far more expensive. Research and development costs along with approval costs and timing are pivotal for the successful completion of such a process.

From a historical perspective, PFDs have evolved ***from a commodity piece of safety equipment*** in the 50's and 60's, ***to a stylized, brightly colored piece of safety equipment*** in the 70's and 80', ***to a customized garment*** in the 90's, and finally ***to a consumer responsive choice for safety*** in the new millennium. Along with this evolution of products, we have seen an evolution of regulations, ***from federal carriage requirements, to state mandatory wear requirements and finally as of December 23, 2002, to federal mandatory wear requirements.***

Due to the distinctive nature of specialty niche product and the limitations for emerging technology within UL Standards, such products typically must seek USCG Approval through the

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Type V Approval Path. These products offer enhanced safety since they are engineered specifically for a particular user or water sports activity, and they are designed around anatomical needs of the wearer and environmental factors the wearer faces while recreating on our nation's waterways.

High performance activities such as personal watercraft operation/riding is a perfect example where life jackets designed and approved specifically for this activity provide an increased level of protection. The Type V Pullover was designed with solid foam across the front of the life jacket to mitigate potential injury of PWC operators hitting the handlebars of the machine. By using thick "foam", the shock of slamming into the machine could be absorbed by the life jacket. In this manner, serious injury to the wearer's internal organs might be avoided, or at least minimized.

Another high-performance activity the Type V Pullover is appropriate for is paddle sports, such as white water rafting and swift water canoeing and kayaking. Again, the solid foam front in addition to arms and a side-entry closure system provides significant protection to the wearer while engaged in these endurance challenging activities.

And the most popular tow-behind activity today, wakeboarding definitely benefits from specialty niche product. Initially avid wake boarders chose to not wear a life jacket at all, or use a non-USCG approved device so that their body would not be encumbered by "heavy foam". But by incorporating lighter foam in neoprene, wake boarders are more willing to wear USCG approved products, particularly Type V wakeboarding devices. Currently the national junior wakeboard champion uses a USCG Approved Type V jon suit for competitive tournaments.

High performance water sports aside, in August, 1998, Dateline NBC aired an investigative report about children's life jackets; this report criticized inherently buoyant child life jackets for their in-water instability particularly on toddlers ranging between 22 to 30 months old and weighing less than 40 pounds. Interestingly enough when non-Coast Guard approved child inflatables were demonstrated, those children unfamiliar with them or who had not been taught survival swimming struggled for stability in the water as well.

To address this alarming performance tendency, the Type V Swimwear Flotation Device was developed. This specialty niche product distributes inherent foam blocks evenly between the front and back, thus enabling the child to remain perpendicular to the water, or straight up and down. Quite frankly, for toddlers in particular, remaining straight up and down in the water is critical for their security.

After all, typically they are transitioning from "crawling" to "walking", and are just beginning to get their "land legs". So to place them in water where their "gravity" is displaced by their "buoyancy" creates havoc on the child. Let's face it. Life jackets are designed to put a child slightly back of vertical if it is a Type III Flotation Aide, or to preferably turn them from a face-down position to a face-up position if it is a Type II Near Shore Buoyant Vest or a Type I Offshore Life jacket. With either type of these life jackets, the child's gravity is challenged by the child's center of buoyancy.

Unless the child has been taught how to react to the supplemental buoyancy placed on his body by the life jacket, the child usually thrashes around when placed in water for the first time. Typically he panics and becomes disoriented by the contradictory in-water actions taking place simultaneously on his body.

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But when a child enters the water in a life jacket that does not disrupt his equilibrium, he relaxes and instinctively adjusts to the “floating” action his body is involved in. Wearing a device that keeps him “upright” and “on top” the water can be a positive experience for kids this age.

And to wear a life jacket that conforms to his individual anatomy without needing subsequent adjustment from belts and buckles is a major benefit. Again, the security of a child is of paramount importance in the water. With the Type V Swimwear Flotation Device, there is nothing other than stretchy lycra fabric that provides the comfort and fit for the child. It is the child himself who determines the shape of this life jacket.

For other types of child life jackets, including hybrids, the device must be adjusted to accommodate the child’s shape; the Type V Swimwear Flotation Device takes on the shape of the child. There is nothing more the child must do to keep it securely in place beyond stepping into it and pulling the suit over his shoulders. After that, the Type V Swimwear Flotation Device conforms to the child’s individual shape, and where necessary, flexes to accommodate that shape.

All of the life jackets mentioned above could never have been offered to the consuming public without the availability of the Type V Approval Path. In each of these cases, the product was created specifically for a particular use or user that is regulated by state mandatory wear laws, therefore, the need for ultra comfort and fit for mobility and continuous wear was essential.

As additional water sports activities emerge or as specific users are identified, the need for Specialty niche product will continue to exist and improve, challenging the cutting edge of technology and design. There is a distinct possibility the Type V Special Use category will expand into Type VI’s, Type VII ’s etc since there will always be a need to create a unique, innovative and consumer responsive life jacket product.

So with this evolution in mind and for the yet to be developed consumer responsive PFD product, **it is my recommendation that the current Life Saving Index be quantified so that it can be used to evaluate individual products instead of simply being used internally by Coast Guard personnel for conceptual evaluations of products.** Accordingly funding for the next phase of development is estimated at \$700,000.00. Previous applications for grant monies have not been awarded through USCG Funding channels.

Furthermore, **it is my recommendation that the CEN/ISO Standard be adopted with National deviations by the United States Coast Guard so that existing Type V products can retain their current USCG Approval and future Type V product submittals can obtain such approvals.**

And finally **it is my recommendation that Type V products not be merged with existing PFD types such as I, II and III for any re-classification effort since doing so would prohibit such product from being compliant to existing state mandatory wear laws.**

These recommendations bring us full circle to the concept of mandatory wear. From my perspective taking mandatory wear to the level of all boaters on all waters in all types of vessels at all times is an aggressive undertaking, one that will most likely be debated for some time. On the other hand, there seems to be support to identify the next targeted boater as operators and passengers in vessels less than 16’.

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In fact, a resolution toward this end was adopted by the National Boating Safety Advisory Council last year for consideration. It is also my understanding the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators passed a similar resolution in 1992, however, at their 2003 Annual Conference, a similarly worded resolution lacked consensus and was tabled for vote.

Nevertheless there is momentum building for increasing PFD wear regardless of the means including the possibility of mandating its wear. Until a definite plan of action is developed and implemented, it would appear prudent to initiate efforts to educate boaters about the finer points of PFDs, their use, care, and limitations.

Specifically I recommend the following precepts be included in media campaigns and curriculums used to teach boaters about PFDs.

- ✓ ***PFDs are classified as Types I through V. These categories are not a rating system but a system which designates PFDs as to the location of its use. A Type I is for off-shore operations. Type II's are for boating near shore; a Type III is a buoyancy aide and should be used where imminent rescue is available; Type IV's are to be thrown to an individual needing immediate assistance and Type Vs are specialty niche product addressing specific activities or consumers.***
- ✓ ***When selecting a PFD, choose one for the location you will be boating in, the activity you will be participating in and the proper size for you. Be sure to read the designated chest size range on the inside label. Measure yourself under the arms to determine whether or not the size marked on the label is the proper size for you.***
- ✓ ***Children sizes are sized according to weight range with some PFDs marked simultaneously with a suggested chest size range. Know your child's weight and chest size before selecting a PFD for him or her. Better yet, take him or her to the store with you and try it on. If it is too small, try a larger size. It's very important to select a PFD for your child that he can easily wear.***

Resources:

Youth PFD Wearing Requirements, Chart published by Balistreri Consulting, Inc.

Mandatory PFD Wear for Personal Watercraft, published by Balistreri Consulting, Inc.

Mandatory PFD Wear for Tow-Behind Activities, published by Balistreri Consulting, Inc.

Reference Guide to State Boating Laws, Sixth Edition , published by NASBLA

USCG Boating Fatality Statistics, 2002, published by the United States Coast Guard

National PFD Wear Rate Observational Study, 2002, published by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc.

Personal Flotation Device Wear Rate Study, published by NASBLA

“Consumers Talk About Life Jackets” A Qualitative Research Report, proprietarily held by Balistreri Consulting, Inc. for E.I. Dupont Nemours, Inc.

Executive Summary

- **Current state laws for Mandatory Wear of PFDs for youth, tow-behind activities and PWC operation/riding consistently produce high wear rates and low fatality percentages. It would appear lives are being saved through these laws.**
- **Consumers participating in water sports activities wear PFDs not only to comply with existing laws but also for personal protection.**
- **Limited consumer feedback indicates a general lack of comprehension about the five types of PFDs; they are regarded as a ranking system, with Type I being the “best, Type V being the “worst” and Type III being “adequate”.**
- **Significant consumer research regarding the choice to wear or not wear a PFD is needed. Increasing PFD wear can only happen if the boater is convinced he needs to wear one and a product that he prefers to wear is available.**
- **No one product can convince boaters to wear PFDs. Offering boaters a variety of products that meet their expectations is pivotal. With this goal in mind, the USCG approval process needs to be streamlined so that manufacturers can respond quickly and efficiently to identified consumer needs and preferences.**
- **For innovative and unique products the existing Type V Product category needs to be simplified to accommodate emerging technologies. The Life Saving Index, or Risk-Based analysis tool needs to be completed so that it can be used to evaluate individual designs.**
- **Existing Type V product should not be negated through adopting CEN/ISO standards by the USCG, nor should it be merged with existing PFD categories for any re-classification effort due to existing state mandatory wear laws.**
- **While mandatory wear is being debated, specific PFD information regarding how a PFD should be selected, parameters of children’s sizing and clarification of the various types of PFDs should be included in media campaigns and boating safety materials.**

Mandatory PFD Wear for Tow-Behind Activities

Total Number of States and US Territories with Mandatory Wear Legislation

41

Mandatory Wear Laws for Tow-Behind Activities

STATE	Mandatory Wear	PFD TYPES	STIPULATIONS	EXCEPTIONS
Alabama	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III, or V	towing a person on water skiis, surfboard, spinners or other similar devices	
Alaska	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III or V life belt or life ring does not comply	towing a person under 13 yrs. of age on water skis, a surfboard or similar device.	
Arizona	Yes	buoyant belt or personal flotation device	person being towed behind watercraft	prof. exhibition
Arkansas	Yes	life preserver or buoyant vest	being towed on water skis, on aquaplane or similar device	
California	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III, or V; persons engaged in barefoot, jump, or trick water skiing may elect to wear a wetsuit designed for the activity and labeled by the mfg. as a waterski wetsuit. A Coast Guard approved personal flotation device as described above shall be carried in the tow vessel for each skier electing to wear a wetsuit.	being towed behind a vessel on water skis, an aquaplane, or similar device including all forms of water skiing, barefoot skiing, skiing on skim boards, knee boards, or other contrivances, parasailing, ski kiting, or any activity where a person is towed behind or alongside a boat.	prof. exhibition official regatta marine parade tournament or exhibition
Colorado	Yes	properly fitting flotation device	surfing or being towed on waterskis, aquaplane or similar device	
Connecticut	Yes	USCG Approved Types I, II, III V, or V Hybrid	Each water skier shall wear and no vessel operator shall tow a water skier who is not wearing.	trick skiing, barefoot waterskiing

Mandatory Wear Laws for Tow-Behind Activities

STATE	Mandatory Wear	PFD TYPES	STIPULATIONS	EXCEPTIONS
Delaware	Yes	USCG App. Type I, II, III or V	No person shall engage in waterskiing unless such person is wearing a PFD.	prof.exhibition, boat race, regatta, marine parade, tournament
District of Columbia	Yes	USCG Approved	Skiers being towed by a PWC.	
Florida	Yes	USCG Approved Types I, II or III inflatable PFDs prohibited	waterskiing or aquaplaning	
Georgia	Yes	Ski belt, ski jacket or USCG Appr. Types I, II or III	any person being towed on waterskiis, aquaplane, surf-board or similar device	
Hawaii	Yes	a life saving device	operate or assist a person on waterskis, aquaplane or similar contrivance	authorized waterski tournament, trials, expo or competition.
Idaho	Yes	USCG App. Type I, II, III or V	When being towed by a boat (water ski, wake board, knee board, tube, etc), an approved flotation device must be worn to be considered readily accessible	
Illinois	No			
Indiana	No			
Iowa	Yes	USCG Approved Types I, II or III	any person engaged in water-skiing, surfboarding or similar activity	windsurfing, participation in tournaments if wearing a wetsuit & further exempted by natural resources commission who has granted a specific

Mandatory Wear Laws for Tow-Behind Activities

STATE	Mandatory Wear	PFD TYPES	STIPULATIONS	EXCEPTIONS
Iowa				exemption in the special events category.
Kansas	Yes	USCG Approved Types I, II or III life belt or life ring does not satisfy requirements	while aboard or being towed	
Kentucky	Yes	USCG Approved Types I, II or III	while waterskiing	
Louisiana	No			
Maine	Yes	life jacket, life belt or similar life-saving device	towed on waterski, surfboards, or similar devices.	
Maryland	Yes	life jacket, life vest, life preserver barefoot wetsuit, trick skiing wetsuit	towing a person on waterskiis, parasail, aquaplane or similar device. Observer must be aboard.	prof. exhibition, regatta motorboat race, marine parade, tournament. or exhibition.
Massachusetts	Yes	USCG Approved Types I, II or III	any person waterskiing or being towed in any manner.	person engaged in slolam skiing on a marked course or a person engaged in barefoot, jump, trick skiing may wear a wetsuit designed specifically for the activity in lieu of CG approved PFD. A USCG App. PFD must be carried in the tow boar for each skier elected to wear a wetsuit.

Mandatory Wear Laws for Tow-Behind Activities

STATE	Mandatory Wear	PFD TYPES	STIPULATIONS	EXCEPTIONS
Michigan	Yes	USCG App. Type I, II or III that is not an inflatable device.	Each person 12 years of age or older operating, riding on or being towed behind a PWC.	
		USCG Approved Type I or II that is not an inflatable device.	Each person less than 12 years of age riding or being towed behind a PWC must wear.	
Minnesota	No			
Mississippi	No			
Missouri	No			
Montana	Yes	USCG Approved in good and serviceable condition	skiers being pulled by motor-boats	
Nebraska	Yes	life preserver, buoyant vest or ski belt	operate/manipulate waterskis surfboards or similar devices	during authorized regattas or similar ski & water shows.
Nevada	Yes	USCG Approved Inflatables NOT approved for water skiing.	a person being towed on skis, an inflatable device, or any similar device	professional exhibition with marine event permit
New Hampshire	Yes	USCG Approved Types I, II or III	towed on waterskis or other appurtenances	directly participating or competing in AWSA approved event or exhibition authorized by special permit.
New Jersey	Yes	USCG Approved Types I, II, III or V Hybrid	rider being towed by a power vessel by means of a tow rope, tow line or training booms	only if granted by waiver from the Boat Regulation Commission.

Mandatory Wear Laws for Tow-Behind Activities

STATE	Mandatory Wear	PFD TYPES	STIPULATIONS	EXCEPTIONS
New Mexico	Yes	USCG Appr. Types I, II or III	Skiers and those being pulled on any flotation object.	
New York	Yes	USCG Approved wearable PFD	All towed activities including water skis, tubes, ropes, parasails and related activities.	professional exhibitions
North Carolina	Yes	life preserver	towing of persons on water skis, surfboards and other similar devices, and the manipulation of such devices by the persons being towed.	professional skiing exhibitions or regattas.
North Dakota	Yes	USCG Appr. Types I, II or III	manipulate any waterskiis, surfboard or similar devices	
Ohio	Yes	USCG Appr. Types I, II, III or V	ride or attempt to ride waterski, surfboard or similar device	for barefoot waterski either a CG Approved Type I, II or III or a wetsuit specifically designed for barefoot skiing.
Oklahoma	Yes	PFD approved & designed for the activity in which the person is engaged; USCG Approved Ski belt not acceptable.	operating or manipulating a waterski, sailboard or similar device	
Oregon	No			
Pennsylvania	Yes	USCG App. Types I, III or V Inflatable PFDs may not be used to meet this requirement.	operate a boat on the waters of this commonwealth for waterskiing.	person engaged in slalom skiing on a marked course or a person engaged in barefoot, jump, trick

Mandatory Wear Laws for Tow-Behind Activities

STATE	Mandatory Wear	PFD TYPES	STIPULATIONS	EXCEPTIONS
Pennsylvania				skiing may wear a wetsuit designed specifically for the activity in lieu of a CG approved PFD. A USCG Appr. PFD must be carried in the tow boat for each skier electing to wear a wetsuit.
Puerto Rico	No			
Rhode Island	No			
South Carolina	Yes	USCG Approved Type I, II, III or V.	waterskiing or rideing on any object being towed by a motorized watercraft.	barefoot waterskiing need not wear USCG Approved device.
South Dakota	No			
Tennessee	Yes	An adequate and effective life preserver, buoyant vest, or life belt filled with kapok, styrofoam or cork, except upon special permit issued by the agency.	Any person riding or attempting to ride upon one (1) or more water skis, surfboard or similar device.	
Texas	No			
Utah	Yes	USCG Approved except an inflatable PFD may not be used.	The operator of a vessel which is towing a person(s) on water skis or other devices	

Mandatory Wear Laws for Tow-Behind Activities

STATE	Mandatory Wear	PFD TYPES	STIPULATIONS	EXCEPTIONS
Vermont	Yes	USCG Approved	operating or towing a person or persons on waterskis, aqua-planes, kite skis, surfboards, or similar devices	prof. exhibition
Virgin Islands	Yes	USCG Appr. Type I, II, III or V	A person may not operate a PWC or other thrillcraft unless each person riding or towed behind vessel is wearing a PFD.	
Virginia	Yes (if no observer in boat)	life preservers	towing a person on waterskis surfboard, or similar device	
Washington	Yes	personal flotation device	engage or attempt to engage in waterskiing	
West Virginia	Yes	USCG Approved Types I, II or III	person towed by a vessel	barefoot waterskiier may elect to wear a non CG Approved suit designed for that activity.
Wisconsin	No			.
Wyoming	Yes	USCG Approved of a suitable size while engaged in such activity	All persons being towed by a Personal Watercraft	All persons utilizing water sports toys are exempt from the requirements of carrying USCG Approved PFDs unless the toy is being

Mandatory PFD Wear for Personal Watercraft

<i>Total Number of States/Territories with Mandatory Wear Legislation</i>	<i>53</i>
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Mandatory Wear Laws for Personal Watercraft

STATE	Mand. Wear	PFD TYPES	STIPULATIONS	EXCEPTIONS
Alabama	Yes	USCG Approved	A person may not operate a PWC unless each person operating, riding on, or being towed is wearing a PFD.	
Alaska	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III or V	Persons Under 13 must wear a PFD.	
Arizona	Yes	USCG Approved wearable PFD	A person shall not operate a PWC unless each person aboard wears.	
Arkansas	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III, or V	All occupants.	
California	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III, or V	Any person on board a PWC	engaged in a professional exhibition or preparing to participate or participating in an official regatta marine parade, tournament or exhibition
Colorado	Yes	USCG Approved	No person shall operate a PWC unless each person aboard wears a PFD.	
Connecticut	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III, or V or V Hybrid; inflatable PFDs shall not meet the PFD requirements.	Any person operating, riding on, waterskiing or being towed behind a PWC must wear a PFD.	
Delaware	Yes	USCG Approved	No person shall operate or ride in a PWC unless such person is wearing an approved personal flotation device.	
Dist. of Columbia	Yes	USCG Approved	Operators, riders and skiers are required to wear a PFD.	
Florida	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III, or V inflatable PFDs prohibited	A person may not operate a PWC unless each person riding on or being towed behind is wearing a PFD.	

Mandatory Wear Laws for Personal Watercraft

STATE	Mand. Wear	PFD TYPES	STIPULATIONS	EXCEPTIONS
Georgia	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III, or V which is properly fitted and fastened.	Each person aboard must wear a PFD.	
Hawii	Yes	USCG Approved; properly fitted	All thrillcraft operators and passengers must wear while riding a thrillcraft.	
Idaho	Yes	USCG App. Type I, II, III or V	An approved flotation device must be worn to be considered readily accessible.	
Illinois	Yes	USCG App. Type I, II, III or V	No person may operate a PWC or specialty prop-craft unless each person aboard is wearing a PFD.	
Indiana	Yes	USCG Approved under 46 CFR 160.060	A person shall not operate, ride on or be towed by a personal watercraft unless every individual is wearing a PFD.	
Iowa	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III or V Inflatables are not approved for use.	All operators and passenger of personal watercraft must wear a PFD.	
Kansas	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III or V	A personal watercraft may not be operated unless each person aboard wears a PFD.	
Kentucky	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III or V	Persons operating or riding as a passenger on PWC shall wear a PFD.	
Louisiana	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III or V	A person shall not operate a PWC unless each person aboard is wearing a PFD.	
Maine	Yes	USCG Approved Type I, II or III	Anyone operating or riding a PWC must wear a PFD.	

Mandatory Wear Laws for Personal Watercraft

STATE	Mand. Wear	PFD TYPES	STIPULATIONS	EXCEPTIONS
Maryland	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III or V	A person may not operate or give permission to operate unless each person on board is wearing a PFD.	
Massachusetts	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III or V	All riders, both operators and passengers are required to wear a PFD while on a jet ski, wet bike or other so called PWC.	
Michigan	Yes	USCG Approved Type I, II or III that is not an inflatable device.	Each person 12 years of age or older operating, riding on or being towed behind a PWC (jet ski) must wear a PFD.	
		USCG Approved Type I or II that is not an inflatable device.	Each person less than 12 years old riding on or being towed behind must wear.	
Minnesota	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III or V	A person may not operate or permit the operation of a PWC without each person on board is wearing a PFD.	
Mississippi	Yes	USCG Approved Type I, II, or III	A person shall not operate a personal watercraft unless each person on board or being towed behind is wearing a PFD.	
Missouri	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III or V	No person shall operate a PWC unless each person aboard is wearing a PFD.	
Montana	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III or V	A person may not operate or ride a PWC unless he is wearing a PFD.	
Nebraska	Yes	USCG Approved	All passengers and operators of PWC shall wear a PFD while the PWC is underway.	

Mandatory Wear Laws for Personal Watercraft

STATE	Mand. Wear	PFD TYPES	STIPULATIONS	EXCEPTIONS
Nevada	Yes	USCG Approved Inflatables are NOT approved for PWC, specifically in NAC 488.410	A person shall not operate or authorize another person to operate a PWC under his ownership or control unless the operator "and each passenger" is wearing a USCG Approved PFD and prescribed by the regulations of the commission.	
New Hampshire	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II or III	Only operator of ski craft must wear; each passenger's PFD must be within arms reach.	No one on PWC must wear; PFDs to be within arms reach
New Jersey	Yes	USCG Approved Types I, II, III or V Hybrid	A person operating a PWC or any passenger on a PWC shall at all times wear a PFD when the PWC is underway.	
New Mexico	Yes	USCG Approved wearable PFD.	Worn by all persons using PWC.	
New York	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III or V hybrid.	No personal shall operate a PWC or a specialty prop-craft unless each person riding on or towed behind such vessel is wearing a PFD.	
North Carolina	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III or V Inflatable PFDs do not satisfy this requirement.	No person shall operate a PWC, nor shall the owner of a PWC knowingly allow another person to operate that PWC unless each person riding on or being towed behind is wearing a PFD.	
North Dakota	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III or V	No person may operate or permit the operation of a PWC without each person on board wearing a PFD.	
Ohio	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III or V	No person shall operate or permit the operation of a PWC unless each person on the watercraft is wearing a Type I, II, III or V personal flotation device.	

Mandatory Wear Laws for Personal Watercraft

STATE	Mand. Wear	PFD TYPES	STIPULATIONS	EXCEPTIONS
Oklahoma	Yes	PFD approved & designed for the activity in which the person is engaged; USCG Approved.	operating or manipulating a PWC.	
Oregon	Yes	Inherently buoyant USCG App. Type I, II or III	No person shall operate a PWC unless each person operating or riding on such vessel is wearing a PFD.	
Pennsylvania	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III or V Inflatable PFDs may not be used to meet this requirement.	It is unlawful for a person to operate, or be a passenger onboard a PWC unless the person is wearing a PFD.	
Puerto Rico	Yes	USCG App. Types I, II, III or V	Everyone while operating or riding a PWC must wear a PFD including those being towed behind or pulled by a PWC.	
Rhode Island	Yes	USCG Approved	No person shall operate a PWC unless he or she and any passenger is wearing a personal flotation device.	
South Carolina	Yes	USCG App. Type I, II, III or V	No person may operate, be in possession of, or give permission to operate a PWC or specialty procraft unless each person is wearing a personal flotation device.	
South Dakota	Yes	USCG App. Type I, II, III or V	No person may operate a PWC unless each person aboard is wearing a PFD.	
Tennessee	Yes	USCG App. Type I, II or III Inflatable cannot be used.	All persons operating or using a PWC must wear a PFD.	
Texas	Yes	USCG App. Type I, II, III or V	No person shall operate a PWC unless each person riding on or towed behind the vessel is wearing a PFD.	

Mandatory Wear Laws for Personal Watercraft

STATE	Mand. Wear	PFD TYPES	STIPULATIONS	EXCEPTIONS
Utah	Yes	USCG Approved except an inflatable may not be used.	All persons on board a PWC shall wear a Personal Flotation Device.	
Virgin Islands	Yes	USCG App. Type I, II, III or V	A person may not operate a PWC or other thrillcraft unless each person riding on or being towed behind such vessel is wearing a personal flotation device.	
Virginia	Yes	USCG App. Type I, II, III, or V	It shall be unlawful for any person to operate a PWC unless each person riding on the PWC is wearing a PFD.	
Washington	Yes	USCG Approved	A person shall not operate a PWC unless each person aboard the PWC is wearing a personal flotation device.	
West Virginia	Yes	USCG App. Type I, II or III	Any person operating, riding as a passenger, or being towed behind a PWC must wear a personal flotation device.	
Wisconsin	Yes	USCG App. Type I, II, III or V as specified under 33CFR, part 175, subpart B.	No person may operate a PWC unless each person riding on the PWC is wearing a personal flotation device.	
Wyoming	Yes	USCG Approved PFD of a suitable size while engaged in such activity.	All persons aboard a PWC.	

Youth PFD Wearing Requirements

<i>Total Number of States and US Territories</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>14 and Younger, Under 13, 12 and Under, Under 12, 11 and Under</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Under 10. Ten and Under, Under 8</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Under 7, Under 6, Five and Under</i>	<i>6</i>

Youth PFD Wearing Requirements

Youth PFD Wearing Requirements

STATE	AGE	Vessel Length	UNDERWAY	PFD TYPES	EXCEPTIONS
Alabama	Under 8	n/a	At all times	USCG Approved	When in enclosed cabin or sleeping space
Alaska	Under 13	n/a	Yes	I, II, III or V	Below deck
American Samoa	None				
Arizona	12 & Under	n/a	Yes	I, II, or III	Not applicable to small passenger vessels that are not for hire on navigable waters, that maintain a Coast Guard certificate of inspection and that are being operated by USCG licensed pilots within a distance of 1/4 mile from the nearest shore as a means of transporting passengers and when the duration of time the vessel is underway on the water does not exceed ten minutes.
Arkansas	12 & Under	n/a	At all times		When in enclosed area of houseboat, cruiser or within railings of party barge when not underway
California	11 & younger	Less than 26 ft.	Yes	I, II, III or V	When in an enclosed cabin, sailboat where child is restrained by a harness tethered to the vessel
Colorado	Under 13	n/a	Yes	USCG Approved	When below deck or in an enclosed cabin
Connecticut	Under 12	n/a	Yes	USCG Approved	When below deck or in an enclosed cabin
Delaware	12 & Under	n/a	n/a	I, II, III, or V	Below deck or in an enclosed cabin when anchored or moored
Dist. of Columbia	Under 13	n/a	Yes	USCG Approved	When below deck or in an enclosed cabin
Florida	Under 6	Less than 26 ft.	Yes	I, II, or III	n/a
Georgia	Under 10	n/a	n/a	USCG Approved	When in fully enclosed, roofed cabin or other fully enclosed, roofed compartment or structure
Guam	None				
Hawaii	Under 13	n/a	At all times	USCG Approved	When below deck of in an enclosed cabin.

Youth PFD Wearing Requirements

STATE	AGE	Vessel Length	UNDERWAY	PFD TYPES	EXCEPTIONS
Idaho	14&Younger	19' or less	Yes	USCG Approved	n/a
Illinois	Under 13	Less than 26 ft.	Yes	I, II, III or V	Not applicable when operating a watercraft on private property
Indiana	Under 13	n/a	Yes	USCG Approved	Waters of concurrent jurisdiction, Lake Michigan, Ohio River, Wabash River where it forms the boundary between Indiana and Illinois, Great Miami River. Where the child is below deck, in an enclosed cabin or watercraft is docked or at anchor.
Iowa	None				
Kansas	12 & Under	n/a	On board or being towed	I, II, or III	n/a
Kentucky	Under 12	n/a	Yes	USCG Approved	Licensed commercial vessel by USCG or toll ferry
Louisiana	Under 13	Less than 26 ft.	Yes	USCG Approved	n/a
Maine	10 & Under	n/a	At all times	I, II or III	n/a
Maryland	Under 7	Less than 21 ft.	Yes	I, II, III or V	Not applicable below deck or in an enclosed cabin
Massachusetts	Under 12	n/a	Yes	I, II, III or V	Below Deck
Michigan	Under 6	n/a	n/a	I or II	n/a
Minnesota	None				
Mississippi	12 & Under	Less than 26 ft.	Yes	I, II, or III	n/a
Missouri	Under 7	n/a	On board	USCG Approved	When in a totally enclosed cabin
Montana	Under 12	Less than 26 ft.	Yes	USCG Approved	n/a
N. Mariana Is.	None				
Nebraska	Under 12	n/a	At all times	USCG Approved	When hunting waterfowl in an anchored boat

Youth PFD Wearing Requirements

STATE	AGE	Vessel Length	UNDERWAY	PFD TYPES	EXCEPTIONS
Nevada	Under 12	n/a	Yes	USCG Approved	A commercial vessel licensed by the USCG for the transportation of passengers for hire; below deck or inside a cabin of the vessel.
New Hampshire	5 & Under	n/a	Yes	I, II or III	Boat vessels & ships w/continuous siderails enclosing the perimeter 3' or none in height & enclosed between the deck and top railing that would reasonably prevent passage of a small child
New Jersey	12 & Under	n/a	Yes	USCG Approved	Large commercial tour or ferry boats
New Mexico	None				
New York	Under 12	65 ft. or less	Yes	USCG Approved	When in a fully enclosed cabin
North Carolina	Under 13	n/a	Yes	USCG Approved	When below deck or in an enclosed cabin.
North Dakota	10 & Under	Less than 27 ft.	Yes	I, II or III	n/a
Ohio	Under 10	Less than 18 ft.	n/a	I,II, III or V	n/a
Oklahoma	Under 13	Less than 26 ft.	Yes	USCG Approved	n/a
Oregon	12 & Under	n/a	Yes	USCG Approved	While below deck or in the cabin of a boat with an enclosed cabin. While on a sailboat and tethered by means of a lifeline or harness attached to the sailboat. While child is on a USCG inspected passenger carrying vessel operating on navigable waters of US.
Pennsylvania	12 & Under	20 ft. or less including canoes and kayaks	Yes	I, II, III or V	n/a
Puerto Rico	12 & Under	n/a	n/a	I, II or III	n/a

Youth PFD Wearing Requirements

STATE	AGE	Vessel Length	UNDERWAY	PFD TYPES	EXCEPTIONS
Rhode Island	10 & Under	Less than 26 ft.	Yes	USCG Approved	n/a
South Carolina	Under 12	Less than 16 ft.	Yes	I, II, III or V	n/a
South Dakota	Under 7	n/a	Yes	USCG Approved	While within a cabin or below deck.
Tennessee	12 & Under	n/a	Yes	USCG Approved	n/a
Texas	Under 13		Yes	USCG Approved	n/a
Utah	12 & Under	Less than 19 ft.	n/a	USCG Approved	n/a
		Over 19 ft.	n/a	USCG Approved	When inside the cabin area
Vermont	Under 12	n/a	Yes and on an open deck	I, II or III	n/a
US Virgin Islands	None				
Virginia	None				
Washington	12 & Under	Less than 19 ft.	At all times	USCG Approved	While child is below deck or in the cabin of a boat with an enclosed cabin; While a child is on a USCG inspected passenger-carrying vessel operating on the navigable water of the US; or While on board a vessel at a time and place where no person would reasonably expect a danger of drowning to occur.
West Virginia	12 & Under	n/a	Yes	I, II or III	Unless the child is below deck or in an enclosed cabin
Wisconsin	None				
Wyoming	None				