



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594  
Safety Recommendation

SP-20  
Log M-328

**Date:** September 2, 1986

**In reply refer to:** M-86-100

Admiral Paul A. Yost  
Commandant  
United States Coast Guard  
Washington, D. C. 20593

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Recently, the National Transportation Safety Board reviewed United States Coast Guard (USCG) boating accident data in an effort to determine the in-service effectiveness and performance of personal flotation devices (PFDs). The data, derived from Boating Accident Reports submitted to the USCG by the States, did not provide an adequate basis for such an analysis. An examination of the USCG Boating Accident Report form revealed that only limited information is recorded on PFD approval, accessibility, and use aboard recreational boats involved in accidents. However, the relationship of these data to actual PFD performance experienced by survivors or fatalities, and the specific type of PFD used by each, was not reported.

The Safety Board has previously identified safety issues in recreational boating and has issued recommendations concerning the implementation of uniform accident reporting and data collection by the USCG. In its 1969 study of recreational boat accidents, boating safety programs, and preventive recommendations, 1/ the Board recommended that the USCG and the States use a uniform boating accident report and conduct investigations to provide information vital to the prevention of similar casualties. Most recently, in its 1983 safety study on recreational boating safety and alcohol, 2/ the Board concluded that deficiencies in information reported to the USCG precluded accurate analysis of alcohol-related accident statistics. As a result of the study, the Board recommended that the USCG and the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) cooperatively develop a model State boating accident report form to include a specific accident causal entry for alcohol involvement in recreational boating accidents. The USCG and NASBLA have developed such reporting format revisions and are expected to implement them soon.

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1/ "Study of Recreational Boat Accidents, Boating Safety Programs, and Preventive Recommendations," February 13, 1969.

2/ Safety Study--"Recreational Boating Safety and Alcohol" (NTSB/SS-83/02).

In 1985, the USCG received reports on 8,305 recreational boating accidents which resulted in 1,116 fatalities and 2,757 injuries. A significant number of the fatally injured persons reported in these statistics actually wore PFDs and, therefore, some of these deaths may be attributed to inadequate PFD performance. Data collected by the current Boating Accident Report form precludes analysis of accident-related factors, including PFD performance. The availability of amplified data would permit the accurate assessment of PFD performance and could lead to improvements in PFD effectiveness, thereby reducing injuries and the loss of life in recreational boating accidents.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the United States Coast Guard:

In coordination with the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators, expedite revision of the Boating Accident Report form to include specific data entries that would enable the accurate assessment of personal flotation device performance. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-86-100)

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, and LAUBER and NALL, Members, concurred in this recommendation.

  
By: Jim Burnett  
Chairman