

Person in Water (PIW) — Prevention, Recovery and Survival in the Maritime Industry

Maritime industry workers such as linesmen, persons working aloft, lashers and those involved in logging operations are at risk of falling into the water. These workers risk falling into cold water, in addition to possible drowning, hypothermia and death. Employers should explore best practices, and develop, implement and comply with PIW procedures.

Employers must provide the following for employees who work around water:

- **Personal flotation devices (PFDs)** such as life preservers, life jackets, or work vests must be provided for workers exposed to falling in the water. The PFDs must be approved and marked with the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) approval number, be maintained in good condition, and be removed when any defects are found. See 1915.158, 1917.95, and 1918.105.
- Life jackets must fit properly and snugly with buckles fastened to prevent slipping off the PIW.
- **Life rings and lines** must be well-marked and placed along the dock and/or on shore-side cranes in sufficient numbers to make them readily accessible.
- **Basket stretchers** or the equivalent must be equipped with a lifting bridle. See 1915.87, 1917.26, and 1918.97.
- **Fixed ladders and portable ladders** must be well-marked, maintained in good condition and in sufficient supply/locations making them accessible in an emergency. Ladders should be clear of marine growth.
- **Recovery devices** that can be thrown and have lines attached, Shepherd's hooks, rescue baskets/cages etc. must be nearby and ready for immediate use.
- Edges must be guarded where workers are at risk of falling into the water.



USCG-approved
Type III life jacket.

Photos courtesy of WA State Parks
Recreational Boating Safety Program

For more information:

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- Fall prevention must be provided when workers are aloft.
- Ensure that workers know the location of the recovery tools (life rings, ladders, etc.).

How to help recover workers who fall into the water:

- Keep PIW in sight;
- Alert emergency responders and others; (managers, supervisors, ship's crew);
- Throw flotation devices (rings, bouys, and life rings);
- Guide the PIW to a recovery point; and
- Follow directions from first responders.

How to survive if YOU fall into the water:

- If possible, before you hit the water, cover your nose and mouth, do not panic — allow your breathing to return to normal;
- Keep your head and neck above the water;
- Look for and grab onto floating items; (huddle closely with others, if multiple PIW)
- Discard objects that may weigh you down (i.e., tool belt); and
- Assume the heat escape lessening position (H.E.L.P.) or fetal position to conserve body heat if in cold water or there is no floating object within reach.



The position H.E.L.P. reduces the effects of hypothermia.

At a minimum a PIW plan should include employee training, prevention and practice:

- Procedures to be followed by all workers, including witnesses, to help rescue/retrieve the PIW;
- Rescue and medical duties for those workers who are to perform them;
- The preferred means of reporting a PIW;
- Alternative alarms to be used to notify employers of a PIW; and
- Periodic drills.

If you have questions about PIW procedures for maritime workers ask your employer or immediate supervisor.

For more information:



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