PERSONAL FLOTATION DEVICES

Personal flotation devices (PFDs, life jackets, life preservers and life vests) are the most important piece of equipment on a boat. There are five types of PFDs. Each one has advantages and disadvantages.

**TYPE I- Off shore life jacket**, designed to turn an unconscious person face-up. (Over 20 pounds of buoyancy.)

**TYPE II- Near-shore buoyant vest**, designed to turn an unconscious person face-up. (Minimum 15.5 pounds of buoyancy.)

**TYPE III- Flotation aid**, not designed to turn an unconscious person face-up, more comfortable for water sports. This type also includes inflatables. (Minimum 15.5 pounds of buoyancy.)

**TYPE IV- Throwable device**, designed to be grasped and not worn. (Minimum 16.5 pounds of buoyancy.)

**TYPE V- Special-use device** must be used in accordance with any requirements on the approved label.
PFD (LIFE JACKET) REQUIREMENTS

All boats must have a USCG approved wearable (Type I, II, III, or V) life jacket on board for each person.

In addition to wearable life jackets, boats 16 feet and over must have a throwable device (Type IV) on board. Canoes and kayaks, regardless of length, are not required to carry a throwable device.

A throwable device may not be used as a substitute for a wearable device.

Type V life jackets must be used in accordance with any requirements on the approval label.

Wearable type life jackets must be “readily accessible”, which means that the PFDs are stowed where they can be easily reached. Type IV (throwables) must be “immediately available,” which means that the PFD cannot be in a protective covering and shall be within arm’s reach of the operator or passenger while the boat is operated. Life jackets must be the appropriate size for the person intended.

Who has to wear a life jacket?

- All water skiers and anyone towed behind vessels, personal watercraft operators and passengers, and sailboarders/windsurfers. Inflatable life jackets are not acceptable for these activities.
- Children 12 years of age and younger on Commonwealth waters when underway on any boat 20 feet or less in length and all canoes and kayaks.
- On Pittsburgh District U.S. Army Corps of Engineers lakes (only), everyone in boats less than 16 feet in length and on all canoes and kayaks.
- Remember, life jackets should be personalized, properly fitted, and tested in the water. Everyone should know how to use them.