

## LIFE JACKETS MATTER

Expect to capsize and swim occasionally when paddling a canoe, kayak or raft - it's part of the sport! But when you hit the water unexpectedly, even strong swimmers need a life jacket, also known as a personal flotation device (PFD). It allows you to concentrate on doing what's needed to execute a self rescue and will allow you to assist others.

Nearly 70% of all drownings involving canoes, kayaks or rafts might have been avoided if the victim had been wearing a life jacket!

## WHAT TYPE IS FOR ME?

Many people think that a life jacket is bulky, smelly and uncomfortable, but that just isn't true anymore. The US Coast Guard places life jackets into appropriate categories for use.

The US Coast Guard is in the development stage of an entirely revamped life jacket labeling system. The new labels are designed to make comparing features easier and to allow the paddler to make the best choice for his/her type of boating. The labels will feature categories of buoyancy instead of the current numeric rating and will also feature a symbol to indicate if the jacket will turn the wearer face up, if the jacket may turn the wearer face up or if the

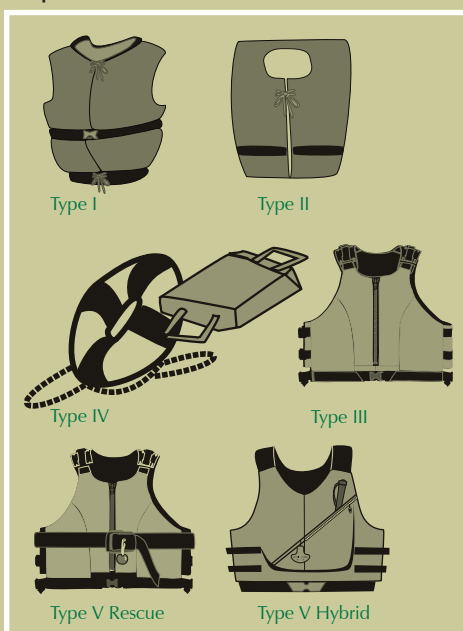
### FIND THE PERFECT FIT

Because paddlers wear their life jackets all day, make sure yours has a secure, yet comfortable, fit. When wearing a life jacket properly you will hardly know you have it on. Although all USCG-approved life jackets meet certain strength and buoyancy standards, they are NOT all the same. Spend some extra money for a higher-quality model. It will have softer foam, a more comfortable fit and improved adjustability.

Make sure the life jacket adjusts easily and fits snugly over clothing worn for different weather conditions. Few universal-sized life jackets fit as well as models sized small, medium, large, extra large and extra extra large. Check the length of



jacket will have no impact on the wearer's position in water other than to float.



the jacket to make sure that it fits while you are paddling. A jacket which hits the backrest in a kayak with each stroke will get annoying by the end of the day.

We all have different shapes and torso lengths. Take the time to find your perfect fit. Several companies now make life jackets designed specifically for women. Kids life jackets are now available in more options than ever before so there is no excuse to skip the life jacket. You should be able to lift children by their life jackets without having them fall out! For very young children with flat torsos, a crotch strap is a great idea to help hold the life jacket in place. The US Coast Guard places people less than 90 pounds into a separate sizing category. If a child is heavier than that, look for an extra-small adult life jacket. The bottom line is: make sure it fits the intended wearer.

## IT'S THE LAW!

State law dictates when PFD use is necessary. Where state laws do not exist, federal law



requires that children under the age of 13 wear a life jacket on a recreational boat, unless the child is below deck, in an enclosed cabin, or if the boat is not under way. Since most paddlecraft don't have decks

below or cabins, this means all the time when in use. Check with your state boating officials regarding your state requirements. Set a good example for youngsters: wear your life jacket.

## BOAT SMART

*Experienced paddlers are four times as likely to wear their life jacket.*

# 85%

*of canoe fatalities were not wearing a life jacket\*.*

# 48%

*of kayak fatalities were not wearing a life jacket\*.*

\*As reviewed by U.S. Coast Guard Office of Auxiliary & Boating Safety 2009.

*Life jackets not only provide additional flotation in case of a capsize or unexpected swim, but they also provide an essential layer of warmth in cold water. Wear it. Life jackets matter.*



Photos courtesy of Paul Villecourt/[outdoor-reporter.com](http://outdoor-reporter.com), Kokatat and NFCT.

## NORTHERN FOREST CANOE TRAIL



The Northern Forest Canoe Trail (NFCT) is a 740-mile recreational paddling trail, the longest inland kayak and canoe trail in the northeastern United States. Flowing with the stories of Native Americans, European settlers, and the development of towns and the timber industry, the Trail's rich heritage offers paddlers a living reminder of a time when rivers were both highways and routes of communication. Recommended as one of North America's top water trails by the ACA, the NFCT represents a series of interconnected destinations, extending through a diversity of waterways, landscapes, and communities. The NFCT organization highlights recreational access, heritage assets, engages communities with their backyard waterways and is managed and maintained by community-based stewardship partners.



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