

## Wearing a life jacket is essential part of boating safety

What can recreational boaters do that will increase their chances of surviving a boating accident?

"Wear it!" say boating safety advocates.

"It" is a life jacket.

Wearing a life jacket habitually represents a sensible precaution when you consider that 90 percent of those who drowned in a boating accident were not wearing a life jacket, and drowning is the reported cause of death in two-thirds of all fatalities.

Accidents on the water can happen much too fast to reach for and put on a stowed life jacket. Wearing a life jacket is the single most important behavior change that could prevent deaths on the water.

"Wear It!" is the theme of this year's National Safe Boating Week, May 17-23.

Boaters worrying that they are expected to wear a bulky orange "horse collar" at all times can relax. Modern life jackets are available in a wide variety of compact, lightweight and attractive styles suitable for constant wear.

Many are partially or wholly inflatable, and resemble a wide set of suspenders or even a belt pack. Special varieties are made for anglers, hunters, skiers and other sports enthusiasts. One new style even has a built-in walkie-talkie.

"If you think about it, a modern life jacket is a lot less restrictive than the automobile lap and shoulder belt most of us wear without a second thought," says Virgil Chambers, executive director of the National Safe Boating Council, an umbrella group representing organizations throughout North America committed to reducing boating accidents and enhancing the boating experience.

"After a few minutes, you forget you're wearing one," adds Chambers. "But if you happen to be involved in a boating accident, you'll be very glad it's on."

Visit [www.SafeBoatingCampaign.net](http://www.SafeBoatingCampaign.net) for additional safe boating resources.



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### Minnesota boating law

Minnesota has the highest per capita boat registration figure in the country.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' Boat & Water Safety program provides the public with safety information and education programs and coordinates the efforts of other safety agencies throughout the state.

For a copy of Minnesota's Boating Guide, a summary of the state's boating regulations, visit [www.dnr.state.mn.us/safety/boatwater/index.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/safety/boatwater/index.html).

### Life vests for children

A legal measure that went into effect in 2005 requires children under age 10 to wear a life jacket while boating in Minnesota.

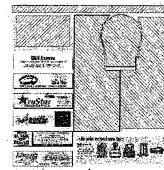
A child should wear a life jacket any time they are near water, such as in a boat or float tube as well as on docks and river banks and at the beach when allowed by the lifeguard.

Contrary to many TV shows and movies, drowning is usually silent. A victim (of any age) in the process of drowning can not cry out for help. They just bob up and down in the water, their head tipped back, mouth wide open gasping for air, and they are silent. It takes as little as 30 - 45 seconds for a child non-swimmer to drown, and it usually happens when an adult is nearby but doesn't recognize the telltale signs of a child in distress in the water.

### Life jacket maintenance

Every spring, check the life vest for fit as well as wear and tear. Throw it away if you find air leakage, mildew, rot or rust. Cut up discarded life jackets so someone else doesn't try to use them.

Wear your own life vest to set an example for your child, and to enable you to help your child if an emergency occurs.



## A proper fit is extremely important



Excess room above the arm openings and the life jacket "riding up" over the chin and face are signs of a bad fit. The life jacket should fit snugly. A proper fit means once it's zippered and/or buckled, it should keep your head and upper shoulders above the water. If it's too loose, the flotation will push the jacket up around your face. If your life jacket is too small, it won't keep your body afloat.

