

To Wear or Not to Wear

A new survey reveals why anglers and hunters don't wear life jackets

Although statistics overwhelmingly show that wearing a life jacket saves lives, many boaters and anglers choose to leave them off. Two hunter and angler focus groups commissioned by the BoatU.S. Foundation for Boating Safety and Clean Water reveal the top three reasons sportsmen don't wear life jackets while boating — and why some choose to.

"The number one reason for not wearing a life jacket was lack of comfort," said Chris Edmonston, Director of Boating Safety Programs at the BoatU.S. Foundation. "Hunters and anglers believe that life jackets are too hot, too uncomfortable, and too bulky. What is surprising, however, is their low awareness of the new class of lightweight, comfortable inflatable life jackets that have been on the market for several years now. Unfortunately, many sportsmen still see life jackets as those boxy orange foam ones they wore as kids," he continued.

Inflatable life jackets, which weigh as little as 13 ounces, come in camouflage and nautical colors, yet provide more buoyancy when

inflated than a traditional foam-filled jacket. "Manufacturers see sportsmen as a viable market," said Edmonston. "And they've succeeded in creating styles that don't interfere with shooting or casting."

The second most common reason for not wearing a jacket was that this group rarely sees professionals on TV wearing their life jackets. "We believe that the media should lead by example," said Edmonston, "Unfortunately, hunting and fishing shows don't treat life jackets the same as, for example, home improvement shows which routinely depict eye or ear protection."

The third most common reason for not wearing a life jacket was that sportsmen feel comfortable with their swimming ability, "A dangerous mistake which has led to many deaths," said Edmonston.

So why do some hunters and anglers choose to wear a jacket? A close call on the water by a friend or family member was the number one reason given in the study. "Sometimes it takes a truly frightening event for a boater to understand the importance of wearing a life jacket," said Edmonston. "It's like wearing a seat belt. It isn't going to help you after tragedy strikes."


The second reason to wear a life jacket was to present a positive role model for children or grandchildren. The third reason given was that it's simply a common sense precaution.

The focus groups were commissioned by the Sportsman's Forum, a coalition of sporting organizations like the North American Fishing



US COAST GUARD

Club, B.A.S.S., Cabelas, and the BoatU.S. Foundation. Additionally, the results of a second national telephone survey on boating and the media have been released by the Forum. This study looked at the media's role in presenting boating information and messages, and its impact on viewers. The full reports of both studies, along with practical boating tips for hunters and anglers, are available as a free CD by e-mailing your name and mailing address to BoatingSafety@BoatUS.com

The studies and subsequent analysis were conducted in Spring 2004 by the research and polling organization Responsive Management. The Sportsman's Forum performs research and education campaigns on safe boating through a U.S. Coast Guard grant, funded by the Wallop-Breaux Trust Fund. 



US COAST GUARD

More Information

- ▶ BoatU.S.
www.boatus.com/
- ▶ BoatU.S. Foundation for Boating Safety and Clean Water
www.boatus.com/foundation
- ▶ Alabama Marine Police
(334) 242-3673
www.outdooralabama.com/boating/