

PFD LAWS



For New York



Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor
State of New York
Rose Harvey, Commissioner
Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation

Personal Flotation Devices

Every pleasure vessel including canoes, kayaks and rowboats operated upon the waters of NYS must have on board one U.S. Coast Guard approved wearable PFD for each person on the vessel. In addition, vessels 16 feet and greater in length must also carry a type IV throwable PFD.



All PFDs carried on board your vessel must be serviceable, readily accessible, and of the appropriate size for the wearer. A serviceable PFD must be free of rot, tears, punctures, or waterlogging. All straps and buckles must be attached and fully functional. Readily accessible means that the PFD must be quickly reachable in an emergency situation.

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Types of PFDs

Off-Shore Life Jacket (Type I PFD)

This type of lifejacket provides the most buoyancy. They are designed to turn most unconscious wearers in the water to a face-up position.

Near-Shore Buoyant Vest (Type II PFD)

Intended for calm, inland water. This type of jacket will turn some users over, but not reliably.

Flotation Aid (Type III PFD)

Good for calm, inland water. These are designed for special recreational activities such as water skiing, but they lack any turning ability.

Throwable Devices (Type IV PFD)

Designed to be thrown to a person in the water, and grasped and held until rescued. These devices are not intended to be worn.

Inflatable PFDs

The USCG is now approving fully inflatable PFDs. While they are comfortable and lightweight, they are not suitable for non-swimmers, waterskiers, youths under the age of 12 and riders of personal watercraft.



Youths Under 12

Any youth under the age of 12 on boats 65 feet or less in length must wear a securely fastened U.S. Coast Guard approved personal floatation device of appropriate size. It does not apply if the youth is in a full enclosed cabin.

NYS Nav. Law Section 40.1(d).



Who SHOULD Wear a PFD

The best option is to always wear a life-jacket, however the smart boater will wear one when there is a chance of:

- High Boat Traffic
- Severe Weather
- Cold Water
- Dangerous Water Conditions
- Boating Off-Shore
- Operating At Night
- Poor Swimming Skills
- Rescue or Assistance is Unlikely

Persons Being Towed

Anyone towed behind a vessel must wear a securely fastened U.S. Coast Guard approved personal floatation device. This includes being towed on water skis, tubes, sails or similar devices. It does not include people to whom assistance is being given.

NYS Nav. Law Section 73.3.



PWC Riders

Anyone riding on a personal watercraft must be wearing a securely fastened U.S. Coast Guard approved personal flotation device. Type III jackets with a high impact rating are recommended for this activity.

NYS Nav. Law Section 73-a.1.



Cold Weather Boaters

Anyone underway in a boat less than 21 feet in length anytime between November 1 and May 1 must wear a securely fastened life jacket. This includes canoes, kayaks, rowboats and motorboats. Commercial vessels are exempt.

NYS Nav. Law Section 40.1(e).