

# FIRST BOAT

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## [Life Jacket Laws and Cold Weather Boating](#)

*Vin Pica takes a cold, hard look at life jackets and the laws that affect you, especially in cold weather boating...*

Guest blog by [Vincent Pica](#)



Photo Courtesy of The U.S. Coast Guard.

*Editor's note: with the freak winter storm that hit the Northeast this Halloween weekend, we thought it was a good idea to remind you about the importance of life jackets, especially in cold water boating. This article from Vin Pica covers life jacket laws and the basics. Check it out...*

As you've seen, we've written a fair number of times about how life-jackets save lives, such as yours. But the state of New York upped the ante recently - and it was well over-do...

## **COLD KILLS**

We've all heard the mantra that "Speed Kills" - and so does cold water. Former New York Governor David Paterson passed a law during his administration that went into effect on 11/1/09 - making his state the first to require everyone aboard all small boats to wear life jackets during the coldest half of the year. As of November 1, kayakers, canoeists and those aboard all other boats under 21 feet must wear Coast Guard-approved personal flotation devices (PFDs) while on New York's coastal waters, lakes, rivers and other waterways. PFDs on such vessels become optional again in the Spring - May 1.

While not as "aggressive" as this author would like, i.e., boats could certainly be larger than 20' and fines could be higher, as an example, let's not be churlish. Although Massachusetts and Connecticut already have similar seasonal PFD requirements, New York's law is broader and affects all pleasure craft including small sailboats and motorboats (rowing shells used by crew teams are exempt).

Massachusetts' law only applies to canoes and kayaks, and Connecticut's law applies to all manually propelled vessels, including canoes, kayaks and rowboats.

## **LET'S REVIEW!**

What are the boating laws in the State of New York? Here they are:

PDF: <http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/recreation/boating/documents/NYSBoatersGuide.pdf>  
(Also linked on FirstBoat's [NY State Boating Resources](#) page).

Every pleasure vessel operated upon the waters of New York must carry at least one USCG approved Type I,II or III Personal Flotation Device (PFD), or life jacket as they are more commonly known, for each person on board.

*All life jackets on your vessel must be:*

- \* Serviceable - free of rot, tears, punctures, waterlogging and all straps functional;
- \* Readily accessible - quickly reachable in an emergency situation, never kept in plastic bags or under lock and key;
- \* Appropriate size for the intended wearer - check the USCG approval label for information on the intended user for a particular PFD.

## **WEAR REQUIREMENTS FOR PERSONAL FLOATATION DEVICES**

- \* Children under the age of twelve must wear a Type I, II or III PFD on board a vessel unless they are in a fully enclosed cabin. The PFD must be the appropriate size for the child.
- \* Anyone operating or riding on a personal watercraft (Jet Ski, Wave Runner, or similar craft)
- \* Anyone being towed behind another vessel such as water skiers, tubers, para-sailing, etc. You are exempt if you are on a disabled vessel and being towed.

## **TYPES OF PERSONAL FLOATATION DEVICES**

### **\* Off-Shore Life Jacket (Type I PFD)**

Effective for all waters, this type of life jacket provides the most buoyancy. They are designed to turn most unconscious wearers in the water to a face-up position. There are two sizes: adult, with 22 lbs of buoyancy; and the children's size with 11 lbs of buoyancy.

### **\* Near-Shore Buoyant Vest (Type II PFD)**

The near-shore buoyant vest is intended for calm, inland water, where there is a good chance of a quick rescue. This type of life jacket will turn some wearers over, but not reliably. The adult vest provides 15.5 lbs of buoyancy, and the child's vest 7 lbs.

### **\* Flotation Aid (Type III PFD)**

Good for calm, inland water, where there is a good chance for immediate rescue. These are designed for special recreational activities such as water skiing. The Type III provides the same buoyancy as the Type II, but without any turning ability. They come in many colors and styles, and in general, are the most comfortable type of life jackets available.

### **\* Throwable Devices (Type IV PFD)**

These PFDs are designed to be thrown to a person in the water, and grasped and held until rescued. These devices are not intended to be worn. At least 1 Type IV PFD must be carried on all vessels 16' or greater in length.

### **\* Inflatable PFDs**

The United States Coast Guard is now approving both automatic and manually inflatable PFDs for use on recreational vessels. Please keep in mind that while they are comfortable and lightweight, they are not suitable for non-swimmers, water skiers, youths under the age of 12 and riders of personal watercraft.

*Always consult the approval label on any PFD to determine if it is approved for the activity in which you plan to use it.*

Don't have a current NYS Boating Regulations Guide? [Email me](#) - we'll find a way to get it to you. Similarly, if you'd like a copy of any of the columns cited, email me and I send it to you.

BTW, if you are interested in being part of USCG Forces, email me at [JoinUSCGAux@aol.com](mailto:JoinUSCGAux@aol.com) or go direct to the D1SR Human Resources department, who are in charge of new members matters, at [DSO-HR](#) and we will help you "get in this thing..."