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# Longfellow's Guidelines on Life Jackets

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## Offshore Life Jacket (Type I)

Designed for boating or sailing on the open ocean, rough seas or on remote waters where a rescue could take a while. Offshore life jackets turn most unconscious people in the water from a face-down position to a vertical (upright) or slightly tipped-back position.



### Advantages

- Has the most buoyancy (floats the best)
- Comes in bright colors
- Has reflective material to help rescuers find a person in the water

### Disadvantage

- Bulky

## Near-Shore Buoyant Vest (Type II)

Designed for general, recreational boating activities. Good for calm, inland waters where there is a good chance for a fast rescue. Near-shore buoyant vests may help turn an unconscious person in the water from a face-down position to a vertical (upright) or slightly tipped-back position.



### Advantages

- Approved for multiple sizes for children and adults
- Not as bulky as an offshore life jacket

### Disadvantages

- Not recommended for rough water
- Has less buoyancy than an offshore life jacket

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## Flotation Aid (Type III)

Used for general, recreational boating in calm inland waters or for the specialized activity that is marked on the device, such as water skiing. Flotation aids are designed to keep a person in a vertical position.



### Advantages

- Considered more comfortable than offshore life jackets or near-shore buoyant vests
- Available in many styles
- Approved for multiples sizes for children and adults

### Disadvantages

- Person may have to tilt head back to keep face out of water
- May not keep an unconscious person's face out of the water
- Not as buoyant as offshore life jackets or near-shore buoyant vests
- Not recommended for rough water
- Must be water-tested by inexperienced swimmers before being used for boating activities

## Throwable Device (Type IV)

Flotation devices (such as a buoyant cushion or ring buoy) that are not worn but can be thrown to a person in the water in an emergency. A buoyant cushion may also be used as a seat cushion. These devices do not take the place of wearing a life jacket.



### Advantages

- May be thrown from boat or land
- Provides backup to wearable life jackets
- Some styles may be used as seat cushions

### Disadvantages

- Not for unconscious persons
- Does not take the place of a life jacket
- Not suitable for inexperienced swimmers or children
- Not safe for rough water

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## Special Use Life Jacket (Type V)

A special-use device is approved only for a specific activity, such as kayaking, water skiing, commercial whitewater rafting or other commercial activities. Some special-use devices provide protection from hypothermia while others are intended for freedom of movement. Special-use devices include boardsailing vests, deck suits, commercial whitewater vests and work vests.



### Advantage

- Designed for specific activities, therefore may be more comfortable for the activity

### Disadvantage

- Less safe than other life jackets if used for activities other than those marked on the label

*Note: The U.S. Coast Guard is currently working to revise the classification and labeling of life jackets and flotation devices.*

## How to Choose a Life Jacket

When choosing a life jacket:

- Make sure it is the right type for the activity.
- Make sure it is approved by the U.S. Coast Guard.
- Make sure it fits properly. Check the label on the life jacket for weight limits.
- Make sure it is in good condition. Check buckles and straps for proper function.
- Throw out any life jacket with torn fabric or straps that have pulled loose.
- Practice putting it on in water and swimming with it on. When you practice, have a person with you who can help if you have difficulty.

## How to Use Your Life Jacket

- Try on your life jacket to see if it fits snugly. Then test it in shallow water to see how it handles. A life jacket is designed not to ride up on the body in the water.
- To check your life jacket's buoyancy, relax your body and tilt your head back. Make sure your life jacket keeps your chin above water and you can breathe easily.
- If your mouth is not well above the water, you may need a life jacket with more buoyancy.

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## How to Care for a Life Jacket

To be sure that your life jacket will be in good shape when you need it, you must take care of it.

- Do not make changes to your life jacket. If yours does not fit, get one that does. An altered life jacket may not work properly.
- Periodically check to see if your life jacket is in good repair and if it provides adequate support. Check it often for rips, tears and holes. Also check to see that seams, fabric straps and hardware are okay. Give your life jacket belts, ties and straps a quick, hard pull to make sure they are secure. You should find no signs of water logging, mildew odor or shrinkage of the buoyant materials.
- Make sure that the snaps, belts, ties, straps and zippers are working properly.
- Do not use your life jacket as a kneeling pad or to sit on. Life jackets lose buoyancy when crushed.
- Hang your wet life jacket to dry in open air or in a well-ventilated area. Do not dry your life jacket in front of a radiator or other heat source.
- Do not leave your life jacket on board for long periods when the boat is not in use.
- Clean your life jacket only as the label instructs.

