

Our Most Precious Resource  
And we fail to protect them!

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We think long and hard about them. We worry about them. We nurture them and plan our lives around them. Then why don't we protect them?

We're talking about our children, our society, or for that matter any society's most precious resource. We're also talking about boating. We're talking about safety and we're talking about logic, and laws, and most importantly, just plain 'ol horse sense!

### **Statistics are telling**

In 2000, the United States Coast Guard reported that twenty-eight (28) children under the age of 12 died in boating accidents (out of 701 reported deaths or 4%). That same year, seventy-two (72) youngsters, aged 13 – 19 died in boating accidents (or 9.7% of the total deaths).

For the under age 12 deaths, 50% died from drowning and in the 13 – 19 year old age bracket, 75% died from drowning. Very telling statistics.... And 1999 wasn't much better.

For those under 12 years old, 51 died, 61% of them from drowning, and in the 13 – 19 year old age bracket, 62 died. 65% of those deaths were attributable to drowning.

Overall, 15% of all deaths from boating took the lives of our children in 1999 and 14% in 2000.

Statistics are sometimes very dry and misleading, but these numbers are alarming, and that's putting it mildly. According to Bruce Schmidt of the Office of Boating Safety, United States Coast Guard, 2001 statistics are still being collated from the states, but preliminary statistics show a reduction in overall deaths.

### **What can you do?**

I boat in what are probably the most congested waterways in America. Long Island, New York from New York Harbor to Montauk has more registered boats and active boaters than any other locale. With over a million recreational boats and boaters, I see a disproportionate number of dangerous situations as it relates to our children.

I see kids without Personal Flotation Devices (PFD's), what the Coast Guard now calls life jackets. I see kids sitting on the bow of boats underway. I see parents disregarding safety and laws, by boating and drinking.

Each and every incident is an accident just waiting to happen! And it doesn't have to be!

What can you do as a boater? Three very simple approaches can save many lives. As a parent or skipper of a boat, make sure that every child under 13 wears a PFD while on board your vessel. Poor swimmers of any age should wear a PFD, and in fact, the National Safe Boating Council would like every boater, regardless of age to wear a PFD.

The second approach is to suggest that all boaters, from children 8 years old and up, take a boating education course. The Coast Guard Auxiliary has a wide range of courses for a wide range of ages and boaters. Education is a primary way of informing the public of dangerous practices. An educated boater is hopefully a safer boater.

The last approach is to report to your local law enforcement authorities when you witness a vessel, with young children, who are not wearing PFD's. Also, when you notice youngsters (or for that matter oldersters) sitting with their feet over the bow. Sometimes a ticket is a sobering experience, which may just save a life.

### **PFD's**

One of the largest source of complaints against wearing PFD's, by all ages is that they are uncomfortable. Whether its an adult who feels that wearing a Type II jacket is demeaning or the child whose jacket doesn't quite fit well, not wearing a PFD invites a greater degree of risk.

Today, more than ever, there is a wider range of PFD's available for purchase and use. From the traditional 'horse collar' Type II orange vest to special purpose Type V inflatable life vests, there is a PFD for every shape and size.

Ever notice or see a picture of a US Coast Guard Cutter or Patrol Boat (or for that matter a USCG Auxiliary Facility)? We're all wearing PFD's, from the Captain of the Cutter down to the Seaman swabbing the deck, to the Auxiliarist helping a stranded boater, when working on a vessel and not in enclosed spaces, we're required to wear our PFD's.

### **Saving our most precious resource**

Next time you go boating with a child, remember, they are our future, and by making them wear their PFD, your taking an additional step in ensuring their safety and their lives.

Boating is a fun sport, but like all sports, when safety is ignored, danger is around the corner.

For more information on boating, safety and boater education, visit the United States Coast Guard and Coast Guard Auxiliary on the internet at <http://www.uscg.mil> and <http://www.cgaux.org>

Enjoy your summer!