

# Personal Flotation Devices

(Lifejackets & Buoyancy Aids)



**the facts....**

A **FREE** safety  
publication from

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# The Facts.....

## What is a Personal Flotation Device?

This is a generic term used to describe lifejackets and buoyancy aids. The main difference between lifejackets and buoyancy aids is that a lifejacket is designed to turn an unconscious person face up on entering the water. A buoyancy aid is not guaranteed to do this and is as the name describes, an aid to keeping you afloat.

## Wearing Personal Flotation Devices

It is vital to wear a buoyancy aid or a lifejacket when afloat or if your activity takes you near the water. You must ensure that it is the correct size, properly fastened and that you understand how to operate it. In sports like jetskiing, water skiing, dinghy sailing, windsurfing and canoeing, wearing the right personal flotation device (PFD) will give you the confidence to enjoy your activity even when you are in the water. For other activities wearing an appropriate PFD can give you extra time for the search and rescue services to find and rescue you.

## Caring for your Personal Flotation Device

Your PFD could save your life, so it is important to look after it. You should have it serviced in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. On a regular basis, you should visually check the PFD for wear and tear, especially at the folds, straps and fastenings. On inflatable lifejackets, check to see if the gas bottle is full, fitted correctly and has no signs of corrosion. If used in salt water, you should regularly wash out your PFD with fresh water and allow it to dry fully before repacking. Ensure you disarm any automatic inflation mechanism before washing your PFD to avoid accidental inflation.

Don't use your PFD as a cushion as this may compress, and thus reduce the effectiveness of the buoyancy. Like most things they do not last forever. If your PFD is looking tatty it may not work so get a new one.

**Wear it!**  
By definition your PFD won't work if you are not wearing it. Ensure that you and your crew wear your PFDs whenever you are on deck, out in an open boat or on open quays, docks and marinas.

## **The right Personal Flotation Device?**

Personal flotation devices are available with foam-only buoyancy, air foam buoyancy or air-only buoyancy. The most suitable type for you will depend on the type of activity and the distance you are likely to be from the shore.

Foam only personal flotation devices provide buoyancy at all times. They may be bulky, but in addition to providing buoyancy, they often provide additional protection against wind and cold.

Air-only lifejackets are likely to be the most compact and comfortable and may be automatically activated on entering the water or inflated manually or orally. Spare gas cylinders and automatic inflation mechanisms should be carried.

The effectiveness of a lifejacket will be affected by the type and amount of clothing worn. If air becomes trapped in clothing, or if a flotation suit is worn in addition to a lifejacket, it may reduce the ability of a lifejacket to roll you face up in the water. Choosing a PFD with more buoyancy may counteract this.

It is recommended that all personal flotation devices are fitted with a whistle, light and retro-reflective strips and should have crotch straps.

For some sports such as jetskiing, water skiing, dinghy sailing, windsurfing and canoeing, specialised personal flotation devices are available which are specifically designed to suit these sports.

## **Understanding Personal Flotation Devices**

Buoyancy is measured in Newton – 10 Newton equals 1 kilogramme of flotation. There are 4 European standards for personal flotation devices which must all carry the CE mark or appropriate ISO standard number. Details on these standards are listed on the back of this leaflet.

# The standards explained.....



EN ISO  
12402 - 5

This 50 Newton Personal Flotation Device is commonly called a Buoyancy aid. It is intended for use by those who are competent swimmers and who are near to the bank or shore, or who have help and means of rescue close at hand. These PFDs have minimum bulk, but they are of limited use in disturbed water, and cannot be expected to keep the user safe for a long period of time. They do not have sufficient buoyancy to protect people who are unable to help themselves. They require active participation by the user. Recommended for Dinghy sailors, windsurfers, waterskiers & Personal Water Craft where the user might reasonably expect to end up in the water



EN ISO  
12402 - 4

The 100 newton lifejacket is intended for those who may have to wait for rescue but are likely to do so in sheltered and calm water. Whilst these lifejackets are less bulky than those with more buoyancy, they are only intended for use in relatively sheltered waters. They may not have sufficient buoyancy to protect people who are unable to help themselves and may not roll an unconscious person onto their back particularly if they are wearing heavy clothing.



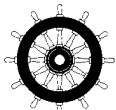
EN ISO  
12402 - 3

The 150 newton lifejacket is intended for general offshore and rough weather use where a high standard of performance is required. It should turn an unconscious person into a safe position and requires no subsequent action by the wearer to keep their face out of the water. Its performance may be affected if the user is wearing heavy and/or waterproof clothing. Recommended for general use on coastal and inshore waters when sailing, fishing etc. where the user would not expect to end up in the water.



EN ISO  
12402 - 2

The 275 Newton Lifejacket is intended primarily for offshore and extreme conditions and for those wearing heavy protective clothing that may adversely affect the self-righting capacity of the lifejacket. This lifejacket is designed to ensure that the wearer is floating in the correct position with their mouth and nose clear of the surface of the water. Recommended for offshore cruising, fishing and commercial users.



EN ISO  
12402 - 1

This type of Lifejacket is IMO / SOLAS approved. These are mainly carried on certain types of commercial vessels like passenger boats. They are usually intend only for use when abandoning ship as they tend to be bulky and difficult to use when working.