



Personal Flotation Devices

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 personal buoyancy 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. Wearing an appropriate personal flotation device can give you extra time for the search and rescue services to find and rescue you.

Understanding lifejackets

Buoyancy is measured in Newtons – 10 Newtons equals 1kg of flotation. There are 4 European standards for personal flotation devices, which must all carry the CE mark:

1. Buoyancy aids with 50 Newtons are only for use by swimmers in sheltered waters when help is close at hand. They are not guaranteed to turn a person from a facedown position in the water
2. The 100 Newton buoyancy aid is for those who may still have to wait for rescue but are likely to be in sheltered and calm water.
3. The 150 Newton lifejacket is for general offshore and rough weather use where a high standard of performance is required.
4. The 275 Newton lifejacket is primarily for offshore and extreme conditions and those wearing heavy protective clothing.
5. IMO / SOLAS approved lifejackets are generally used for abandoning ship and are not intended for everyday use as they are generally bulky.

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.
- 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 jet skiing, water skiing, dinghy sailing, windsurfing and canoeing, specialised personal flotation devices are available which are specifically designed to suit these sports.

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. If used in salt water, you should regularly wash out your PFD with fresh water and allow to dry fully before repacking. Ensure you disarm any automatic inflation mechanism before washing your PFD to avoid accidental inflation.

FOR ADVICE ON ALL ASPECTS OF WATER SAFETY LOG ONTO www.iws.ie

Irish Water Safety
The Long Walk
Galway
T: 091-56.44.00
F: 091-56.47.00
Email: info@iws.ie
Web: www.iws.ie

