

Everybody knows that it's a good idea (and the law) to have some basic life saving and signaling devices aboard your boat. So is the minimum required a good idea? And just what do I need for my particular boat? Let's start with the basics, I'll list the minimum required and then make some suggestions. This article will address recreational boats only. Commercial craft are addressed under CFR46.

Life jackets: Known in technical terms as "PFD's" (personal floatation device)

As per the USCG 33CFR subpart A-175.17: No person may use a recreational vessel unless at least one PFD of the following types is on board for each person: Type I, Type II, Type III.

A Type I is the expensive orange job with good metal clips and reflective tape designed to turn an unconscious person face up and vertical in rough water. A Type II is the type you buy in bags of four or six with plastic clips, no reflective tape and are typical of the "Coast Guard Package" stuff supplied by most dealers. A Type III is best described as a water skiing vest and may be adorned with pictures of super heroes. In all cases the PFD must be readily available and in good condition and of a suitable size for its intended wearer. It may not be still in the plastic bag. Any child under the age of 13 years must be wearing a suitable PFD unless they are below decks in a cabin boat. In addition any vessel of 16 feet or longer including canoes you must also have a Type IV device. A Type IV device is a "throw able device" like a square cushion or ring. Remember that the USCG designator printing must be legible for the device to be compliant.

My thoughts on PFD's. My thoughts go back to the days I worked on large passenger vessels and had to conduct man overboard drills, fire drills and pass rigorous inspections of craft and gear. I have had to try and pick out a single bobbing head in relatively calm water in broad daylight and let me tell you that it ain't easy. Take your eyes off that person for a split second and they are gone. Add larger seas and diminished visibility to the mix and the odds of recovering a living breathing person drop to near zero. A whole bag of Type II PFD's cost maybe \$40 if you find them on sale. A single good Type I will cost around \$60 and I seldom ever see them on sale. What is your life worth? What I suggest to my clients is to determine their normal crew, typically immediate family. Buy a Type I for every normal crewmember, make them put it on and adjust it to fit. Take a sharpie and write their name across the back and breast. Now buy a plastic whistle and two good quality chemical light sticks and attach them to each jacket. Go ahead and keep the "bag-O jackets" for those times when your puttering about with guests and need sheer numbers of PFD's to be legal.

Train your kids early and be firm. No jacket, no boat rides. My three kids are automatic about their jackets but the oldest tries to "forget" every now and again.

Trivia question: What is most common description of recovered overboard persons?

Emergency Signaling Devices: Most people use flares as signals. They are required to operate any vessel 16' feet or greater. Three signals being day and night use are required. They are conveniently sold pre-packaged in compliant sets and dated for easy inspection.

My thoughts on signaling devices: 1) buy flares like eggs and milk. Always dig to the back of the shelf because the store rotates stock to sell the oldest flares first. 2) If you

travel off shore or run a flats boats deep in the bushes spend a couple bucks for a Solas rated parachute signal rocket. A typical Orion 12 gauge signal achieves an altitude of a whopping 300 feet and burns for almost six whole seconds. About as helpful as a bottle rocket to be frank. In contrast a Solas rated rocket hits a ceiling of over 900 feet and burns at 30,000-candle power for 40 seconds. Trust me, somebody is going to see it. They cost about \$45. Get one to compliment the orange box-O-flares that the local law expects to see.

Next week I'm thinking about covering carbon monoxide. If that sounds boring then ask me a good question about anything and Ill do my best to answer and entertain.

Trivia answer: Most overboard recoveries are males found with their pants unzipped. Use the head or a bucket next time! And keep one hand for the boat!