

# FACT SHEET: LIFEJACKETS

## Lifejackets are life savers.

- Research commissioned by Maritime NZ shows that people who wear lifejackets on the water are more likely to survive if something goes wrong.
- Not wearing a lifejacket is the leading risk factor for boating fatalities. The other key risks are: not carrying communications, not checking the weather, and drinking alcohol.
- Two-thirds of those who die in recreational boating accidents each year could be saved if they wear a lifejacket. *Source: NPBSF 2006*
- Men aged 40 plus are over-represented in recreational boating fatalities. Qualitative research suggests their “bulletproof” attitude to safety is the main issue. *Source: IPSOS 2013*
- Everyone on board a boat less than 6 metres should wear a lifejacket at all times. Most accidents occur suddenly, with no warning – there may be no time to grab a lifejacket, and it is extremely difficult to put on a lifejacket in the water. Many boaties drown less than 200 metres from shore.

### What the research shows

- Maritime NZ figures show 31 people died in recreational boating accidents in New Zealand waters in 2014-15 (June to June), 16 people in both 2015-16 and 2016-17, and 11 people in 2017-18.
- In research commissioned by Maritime NZ, 74% of vessels were carrying enough lifejackets for all those on board. Sail boats and canoes had the highest rates (80% and 79%, respectively), and stand-up paddleboards had the lowest (52%). *Source: IPSOS NZ 2018*
- Only 59% of boaties say they wear a lifejacket at all times on the water, a decrease of 1% since 2017 (and 4% since 2016). This rate is highest for canoeists (81%), dropping to 41% for people on sail boats and 37% for those in large powerboats (greater than 6m). *Source: IPSOS NZ 2018*
- Qualitative research prepared for Maritime NZ shows the key barriers to wearing a lifejacket are people’s confidence as a skipper and/or a swimmer, the perception of there being no risk, and feeling uncomfortable or uncool wearing a lifejacket. *Source: IPSOS 2013*
- People wear a lifejacket because the skipper or boat club insists; they are taught or given expert advice to do so; they feel safer wearing one or have one that fits comfortably; they know the risks of not wearing one; and/or they want to set an example to others, such as children.

### What the law requires

- Recreational boaties are legally required by maritime rules to carry enough correctly sized, serviceable lifejackets for everyone on board.
- Maritime rules make it the skipper’s legal responsibility to ensure that lifejackets are worn in situations of heightened risk – such as when crossing a bar, in rough water and during an emergency.
- Many council bylaws make the wearing of lifejackets compulsory on small craft, with some allowing them to be removed if the skipper considers the risk to be low.

## **NZ Safer Boating Forum and Maritime NZ's position**

- The Forum and Maritime NZ support the move to make lifejackets compulsory for all children aged under 15.
- Maritime NZ and the Forum also encourage everyone on the water to wear lifejackets at all times, particularly in vessels under 6m. This is aimed at reducing the number of boating fatalities and encouraging a behaviour change by boaties, to wear their lifejackets rather than just carry them.

## **About the NZ Safer Boating Forum**

- The NZ Safer Boating Forum is a network of government agencies, local body groups and marine industry associations and publications that promotes recreational boating safety in New Zealand.
- In October 2013, the Forum joined national boating authorities from Australia, Canada, France and the United Kingdom as a safety partner to the International Lifejacket Wear Principles. These principles are aimed at promoting personal responsibility through wearing lifejackets in small vessels and making lifejackets a normal part of any media, publicity or advertising involving small boats.

## **Choosing a lifejacket**

- Lifejackets must meet New Zealand Standard (NZS) 5823: 1999, NZS 5823: 2001, NZS 5823: 2005, or another national or international standard substantially complying with the New Zealand standards. For more information about lifejackets, visit [maritimenz.govt.nz/lifejackets](http://maritimenz.govt.nz/lifejackets).
- It is essential to have the correct size and type of lifejacket for the person and boating activity. Lifejacket retailers can help with selecting the right lifejacket.
- Some lifejackets provide more than flotation – they allow a person in the water to keep still and conserve their energy, which will help to delay the onset of hypothermia.
- Crotch straps to stop lifejackets riding up are recommended for situations other than very calm water and are mandatory for all lifejackets worn by children.

## **Checking your lifejackets**

You need to wear a lifejacket that works and the only way to know it's safe is to check it regularly.

- Kapok lifejackets are unsafe – kapok was used to fill lifejackets 30 years ago, but we now know it can absorb water and cause wearers to sink.
- Wear and tear can shorten your jacket's lifespan, which manufacturers say is usually up to 10 years.

For more information on checking lifejackets, visit

<https://www.maritimenz.govt.nz/recreational/safety/lifejackets/check-your-lifejacket.asp>

- Inflatable lifejackets need to be checked and serviced regularly so that they will work when needed.

## **Looking after lifejackets**

- Lifejackets should be worn – not stowed under seats or forward in the cabin – in case of capsize or other emergency. When not in use, store lifejackets away from the sunlight. Ensure they are dry and clean and away from chemicals.

*For more information, contact Maritime NZ's media line on 04 499 7318 or go to [maritimenz.govt.nz/lifejackets](http://maritimenz.govt.nz/lifejackets).*