

Topic:

Life Vests, Personal Flotation Devices – PFDs

QC-0506

Resource:

[PFD
Selection](#)

Basics: Known also as life vests, PFD's are an essential gear element. They serve many purposes, including flotation, impact protection, thermal insulation, and visibility, but are only effective when actually worn. One common factor in most paddling related deaths is lack of or non-use of a PFD.

Question: *What is the most popular vest for paddlers?*

Answer The Type-III vest is the typically the best option for paddlers. It will not roll an unconscious victim face up but offers excellent buoyancy if properly fitted and adjusted. Its chief advantage is flexibility of movement for paddlers. It is also generally less cumbersome for ease in entering the boat either from water or from land. Some Type-V or specialty vests, such as “inflatables”, are popular with racers because of their trim outline and low weight.

Question: *What factors should be considered in selecting a vest?*

Answer: A vest should be well suited to your size and weight and allow for adequate adjustment over both warm and cold weather clothing. Properly fitted it should not pull over your head when tugged by the shoulder straps. Kayakers need brightly colored vests to enhance visibility. Most good vests will also have pockets to store essential gear, especially signal devices like a whistle, mirror and flares. Guide vests may come equipped with a tow belt to aid in recoveries.

Advanced Concepts: You may want to get more information on the following:

- How should one care for a good PFD?
- How do you know when to discard a vest?
- What are the Coast Guard Rules for use of a vest by boaters?
- How should these rules be applied to kayakers

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