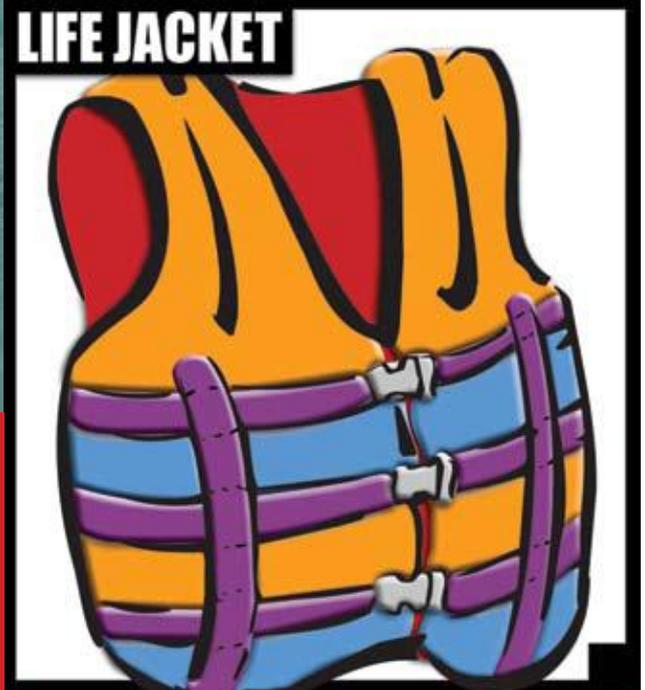


SAFETY FIRST



LIFEJACKETS AND BUOYANCY AIDS

Kevin Lewis, ABC Dinghy Coordinator

Recently, the ABC Safety Committee had a meeting to further consider issues to make Middle Island, and Dinghy Sailing in particular, safer for members and those hiring club dinghies. Safety has always been a top priority for this Club, and for us, like any organization, safety must in fact be a rolling issue that is regularly addressed, with continual improvements and new ideas. Over the next few issues of Horizons, we will present ideas that ABC see as important and that members should consider adopting in their own boating activities. Feedback is welcomed, especially any extra advice or situations where members have learnt valuable lessons. We start with the number 1 issue:

Buoyancy Aids and Lifejackets: Personal Flotation Devices (PFD's)

Buoyancy aids simply assist the wearer to float in the water, lifejackets will turn you face up and help keep the head and mouth out of the water. Buoyancy aids are usually recommended for dinghy sailing because they tend to allow more movement.

Lifejackets come in various forms, and can have some inherent foam buoyancy with additional air inflation, or they may simply be compact un-inflated jackets with either manual or auto-inflate systems. Ferry staff and workers in the marine environment are often required to wear such lifejackets. Auto inflate systems are useful if

there is a chance that the wearer will be knocked unconscious, they can be water sensitive or pressure sensitive, the latter tends to avoid accidental inflation in "extreme" conditions. Auto inflate lifejackets can be dangerous in some types of rowing boats where they would hinder escape on capsize, and in the UK the RNLI (Lifeboat Institution) does not use auto-inflate lifejackets because they would make escape from underneath a capsized boat extremely difficult. Both buoyancy aids and lifejackets have various rating and approval systems. The European Union now approves PFD's with the CE mark of approval. The "N" or Newton rating gives an indication of how much buoyancy the jacket provides, and every Buoyancy Aid should be marked to indicate the appropriate weight or age group recommended for that particular jacket. Note that very small lifejackets for children obviously will have a reduced amount of buoyancy, but will have the same actual buoyancy rating as adults' jackets. It goes without saying that your lifejacket or buoyancy aid must be in reasonable condition, and if inflatable, checked regularly. A crutch strap, if fitted, should be used; this is particularly important for very young children.



Auto inflate lifejacket

50 Newton Buoyancy Aid

Standard buoyancy recommended for dinghy sailing, provides adequate support for swimmers and those who can help themselves while in the water

100 Newton Buoyancy Aid

10kg of buoyancy, suitable for swimmers but will not guarantee to keep airway above water in poor conditions

150 Newton Lifejacket

15kg of buoyancy, suitable for offshore conditions and non swimmers

275 Newton Lifejacket

27.5kg of buoyancy, high performance offshore lifejacket suitable for extreme conditions when wearing heavy waterproof clothing. Upon inflation, the wearer may have very restricted movement in the water.

Many yacht sailors assume they will not fall over board and seldom wear any type of PFD. Across the globe, although it is now standard practice to insist lifejackets are carried on board, only some countries and clubs actually insist on yacht sailors wearing lifejackets. Many sailors view them as unnecessary except in extreme conditions, too cumbersome for those on high performances racing yachts, too hot for warm climates and simply “uncool”, not matching the team shirts and giving an impression of a lack of confidence or experience. Too often the beginner or “guest” is the only one on board seen wearing the lifejacket. The RYA recommends that you should be able to put on your lifejacket correctly in less than a minute, even in the dark; practice until you can! During some regattas where wearing lifejackets is not mandatory, the Race Committee may raise a “Y” flag – one meaning of this flag is: “wear personal buoyancy”!



Y flag

Lifejackets required: one club lays down the law
<http://old.cruisingworld.com/vancopfd.htm>

ORC (Offshore Racing Council) Special regulations:
www.orc.org

RORC (Royal Ocean Racing Club) Special regulations & prescriptions
<http://www.rorc.org/specialregulations>

The RNLI are world leaders on sea safety. Advice on lifejackets here:
http://rnli.org.uk/what_we_do/sea_and_beach_safety/sea_safety/resources

PBO Magazine tested 6 new lifejackets. See the videos here:
<http://www.ybw.com/pbo/video/lifejackets>

Here at ABC, it has long been a requirement that members wear buoyancy aids when sailing club dinghies. However, it cannot be stressed enough that the jacket must be a good (and tight) fit. Loose PFD's will not only get in the way, but will also ride up when in the water, and in extreme cases may actually slip off: get a good fitting buoyancy aid. Also make sure it is completely done up, however tempting it may be to unzip in hot weather! Buoyancy aids are now also required to be worn by all drivers and passengers in ABC “Open” boats. Practically this means all our safety boats. Please cooperate with staff who should be asking you to wear them!



Remember that for safety, if using a trapeze harness, the harness may be worn over the top of the buoyancy aid. This is often not as comfortable, but it means the harness can be released easily in an emergency situation; if the harness buckle is underneath it means the buoyancy aid must be removed before the wearer can undo their harness. This is particularly important for those with limited high performance sailing experience, but does add more straps and buckles that in turn may get caught up. More “seasoned” dinghy racers may now wear Rash Vests over both harness and buoyancy aid, these are more aerodynamic and cover awkward straps and buckles.

Some skippers insist on lifejackets during any Man Overboard situation, during the commotion it is very easy for another crew member to fall overboard, especially when trying to retrieve the casualty. Sea sick crew members should also wear lifejackets it likely they will be leaning over the side of the boat!

For large offshore yacht races, some members may be familiar with the ORC / ISAF Special Regulations. The present ABC Sailing Instructions point us towards the ORC Special Regulations which require “each crew member to have a lifejacket”. RORC has added a prescription (5.01.6) which state that a harness and lifejacket shall be worn between the hours of sunset and sunrise, when alone on deck, when reefed, when the wind speed exceeds 25 knots or when visibility is below 1 nautical mile. Certainly points to ponder.