

# 20

EVERYONE CAN BE A LIFESAVER



**Royal Life Saving**  
ROYAL LIFE SAVING SOCIETY - AUSTRALIA

FACT SHEET No. 20

# Watercraft Safety



## Q. Are drowning deaths involving watercraft common?

A. Yes. On average, 29 people a year drown while using watercraft. The ocean is the most common location for watercraft related drowning deaths, followed by rivers and beaches.

## Q. What types of watercraft are involved?

A. All watercraft pose a drowning risk. Some of the types of watercraft more commonly involved with drowning deaths are small aluminium boats (tinnies), jet skis, kayaks, motorised watercraft, sailing boats and inflatable dinghies.

## Q. How does watercraft related drowning occur?

A. Drowning deaths while using watercraft occur when people are not wearing Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs), when they drink alcohol and fall in, when they are unprepared to cope with changing weather conditions, when they collide, or when watercraft is not seaworthy.

## Q. What is a Personal Flotation Device (PFD) and why do I need one?

A. Any garment worn on the body to assist with flotation is called a Personal Flotation Device (PFD). PFDs include devices previously known as lifejackets, buoyancy vests or buoyancy garments. They are usually classified according to the wearer's needs and the level of protection they offer. PFDs should be properly fitted for wearers of all ages. See Fact Sheet No. 19 for further information.

## Q. Who is responsible for the safety of people on a boat?

A. The captain has an overall responsibility for the safety of their passengers, and must ensure there are sufficient lifejackets for all people onboard. However, it is the responsibility of each individual to ensure their own safety by wearing a PFD, avoiding alcohol, refraining from risky behaviour, and complying with the captain's requests.

## Q. Does alcohol play a role?

A. Alcohol is a contributing factor in at least 20% of all adult drowning deaths. Alcohol is also often involved in watercraft related deaths.

## Real Life Story - Lifejacket may have saved fisherman

A 77 year old man has drowned after being flung from his boat whilst fishing. The man drowned in 2.5 metre seas on the New South Wales south coast. Bystanders tried to throw the man a PFD as he was not wearing one at the time of the incident. His death highlights the importance of boating safety with maritime and water safety groups urging skippers to log details of their trips, checking ocean conditions and wearing life jackets.

**ROYAL LIFE SAVING HAS DEVELOPED A NUMBER OF FACT SHEETS ON WATER SAFETY ISSUES IN AUSTRALIA.**

Contact Royal Life Saving on: **1300 737 763**  
or download them from: **[www.keepwatch.com.au](http://www.keepwatch.com.au)**

## Watercraft Safety Checklist:

- Weight centred when entering and leaving a small boat
- All gear stowed safely and securely
- All people on board wearing properly fitted Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs)
- Complied with boat traffic rules
- Avoided swimming areas, weirs, rocks and other watercraft
- Monitored weather reports before and during watercraft activity
- Kept a lookout for bad weather whilst on the water
- Informed others not on board of your destination and when you intend to return

**ALWAYS WEAR A LIFEJACKET WHEN ON THE WATER.**

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