



#BeBuoyant: Life Jackets Save Lives
Water Safety USA Announces 2020 Messaging

Colorado Springs, COLORADO, May 11, 2020—Water Safety USA, a consortium of national nonprofit and governmental organizations focused on drowning prevention, has announced its water safety message for 2020. “#BeBuoyant: Life Jackets Save Lives.”

Deaths from drowning are preventable tragedies. A simple yet very effective life-saving strategy is to wear a properly-fitted life jacket.

While drowning in swimming pools gets significant attention, the fact is more Americans fatally drown in open water, which include lakes, rivers, reservoirs, ponds, and oceans. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2016 statistics, more than half (57%) of fatal and nonfatal drownings among teens and young adults ages 15 and older occur in natural water settings. Adults are also at risk. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has found that over the last ten years the majority of water-related fatalities that occurred at USACE lake and river projects nationwide were people age 18 or older (86%), male (87%), not wearing a life jacket (87%), and associated with swimming (54%).

One factor contributing to fatal drownings in open water may be the expectation that because an individual is able to swim in a pool, they can swim in open water. However, hidden hazards in open water can increase the risk of drowning. These include sudden drop-offs, dangerous currents, vegetation and rocks, colder temperatures, difficult-to-judge distances, rough water including waves, limited visibility, and more. It is recommended that everyone who is in or around open water wear a life jacket as an extra layer of protection, especially outside of a lifeguarded area.

“If people intentionally enter the water without wearing a life jacket, it’s logical to expect that they thought they knew how to swim. Perhaps that’s based on experiences of swimming in pools or places where you can easily get to safety or touch the bottom. When you have to deal with wave action or open-water currents, your swimming ability may not be as good as you think, especially if you don’t swim on a regular basis,” says Pam Doty, USACE National Water Safety Program Manager.

According to U.S. Coast Guard Recreational Boating Statistics, in 2018 there were 4,145 reported accidents, 2,511 reported injuries, and 633 deaths on our nation’s waterways. A majority of those deaths (77%) were due to drowning and 84% of those were not wearing a life jacket.

Many people who participate in boating or associated activities including fishing, hunting, paddling, and towed water sports, mistakenly think they won’t drown because they know how to swim, or they don’t plan on getting in the water, or it is a nice calm day so nothing is going to happen. In fact, these are the settings for when the majority of drownings happen. Another factor that plays a role is alcohol, which can impair one’s judgment and abilities in and around water.



Some families may use swimming aids and other things such as inflatable water wings and rings instead of life jackets. While these toys may provide some buoyancy in the water, they do not prevent drowning and should not be used as a replacement for life jackets. Inexperienced and non-swimmers, particularly children, are at risk in settings such as pools, waterparks, and designated swimming beaches when supervision lapses or it is crowded, so wearing properly-fitted life jackets provide an additional layer of protection in these situations.

There are a few things to keep in mind when choosing a life jacket for your water-related activity. Not all U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets perform the same way, so check the label to be sure your life jacket is appropriate for your planned activities and the water conditions you expect to encounter. Ensure that it fits properly and test its performance so you are comfortable with how it fits and functions.

Important reminders:

- Make sure your life jacket is U.S. Coast Guard approved.
- Double check that your life jacket is appropriate for the water activities that you and your loved ones will be participating in. Some will rotate a person so they are face up if they become unconscious and some will not. Read the label!
- Take the time to ensure a proper fit: right size and right weight rating. Infants and young children should wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket with both a collar for head support and a strap between the legs.
- Check your life jacket. Make sure it is in good serviceable condition, with no tears or holes.
- Life jackets are not swim-lesson aids. However, exposure to life jackets during swimming lessons teaches a child how it should fit, and how it feels and performs in the water.
- A life jacket is just one of the layers of drowning prevention. Children who have learned to swim, are comfortable in the water, or are wearing a life jacket still need other layers of drowning protection, including close supervision, fencing barriers, and lifeguards or water watchers.
- Everyone, including teens and adults, need to wear life jackets in or around open water, especially outside of a lifeguarded area.

Water Safety USA's 2020 campaign is an extension of prior messaging designed to combat drowning. Taken together, the organization's campaigns provide a roadmap for drowning prevention: Designate a #WaterWatcher to maintain constant supervision of children when in, on, or near the water; ensure that you and those you love are #WaterCompetent; be #WaterCautious to prevent unsupervised access to water; and #BeBuoyant by wearing a properly-fitted life jacket.

About Water Safety USA

Water Safety USA is a consortium of leading national governmental and nongovernmental organizations with a strong record of providing drowning prevention and water safety programs. Our mission is to empower people with resources, information, and tools to safely enjoy and benefit from our nation's aquatic environments. Learn more about Water Safety USA at www.watersafetyusa.org.