

**PFD WORKSHOP SESSION**  
**AT THE SUMMIT**  
**Monday 19 April 2004**  
**Panama City, Florida**

William Griswold, Chairman of the National Safe Boating Council, took these notes.

Virgil Chambers acted as the moderator. The Coast Guard wants to increase the wearage of PFD's. A National PFD wear rate study, done by JSI shows that the wearage rate over the last 5 years has not improved.

Capt. Evans, USCG, said that in Jan./Feb. 2003 analysis data showed that 757 people perished in boating accidents and out of that 524 drowned. 442 were not wearing a PFD, and that 85% of those drowned could have survived had they worn a PFD. The JSI Exposure Study, taken at 140 locations in all-50 states counted people who were wearing their PFD. This study lasted 5 years and found that Personal Water Craft (PWC) and kayakers were at # 1 and 2 regarding wearage rates. 90% of PWC operators and in the high 80% of kayakers were wearing their life jackets. In boats less than 21 feet, the wearage rate was less than 5%, despite all our efforts to reach this population of small boat operators. We are looking for a strategy, because we do mandate that PWC riders wear a PFD, but that kayak and canoe operators do it voluntarily. The National Boating Safety Advisory Committee (BSAC) joined the discussion and urged a workshop to be held at the Miami Boat Show in early 2004. This workshop is the second such forum. As soon as mandatory wear of PFD's became news, many groups jumped in and the issue became immediately polarized. But the word got out, and mandatory regulation is but one strategy. At the Miami Boat Show, the PFD displays were invisible, tucked away on a second floor, and they were not very visible at manufacturer's displays, except for the PWC ones. The PWC vendors had color-coordinated jackets displayed, which looked cool and attracted attention. Capt. Evans questioned when a kayak is sold why isn't a PFD included with the product? Other boats should come with more than the "keyhole" type of jacket, and become part of the gear that goes with a boat. Manufacturers could put their name/logo on the jackets to make them more attractive. He is gathering ideas.

Barbara Byers, Canadian Safe Boating Council (CSBC) – She stated that the issue is an emotional one, and the role of government and other organizations must be clear. Her organization completed the Canadian PFD Wear Study, a comprehensive study complete with wear rates, statistics and reviews of previous studies from all over. They hired Smart Risk, an independent group to look at the issue. Behavior changes, assessing risk were but some of the topics of their study. They included looking at creating legislation to mandate wear. They found that about 21% of all Canadian boaters wear their jackets. A key finding was that the absence of a PFD in 87% of the fatalities was the cause of death. They searched other studies and interviewed 30 U. S. State Boating Law Administrators (BLA). They also found that very few people have ever seen or had first hand knowledge about a drowning incident. They also likened having the jacket immediately available is like putting on a seat belt just prior to the crash. In Canada, cold water and hypothermia is a large factor, and most of their drowning occurred in water less than 68 degrees F. They studied seat belt, bike helmet and motorcycle helmet experiences. They found that a social marketing campaign mainly preaches to the converted, but is not strong enough to change behavior. Their

conclusion was that mandatory regulation would be the most significant direction to take to increase PFD wear rates to combat the fatality rate. CSBC is now seeking a strategy to find stakeholders to get a broader buy in. Public interest is gaining support.

Ashley Windsor, PCI Communications (a public relations firm) – PCI has a contract with the Coast Guard to brand safe boating, and has embarked on such programs as the Waterway Watch program as well as the National Safe Boating Week campaign. They reach out to the media to convince boaters to wear their jackets. They must know their audience who thinks that just having a PFD is all right, and it's OK to require children to wear theirs. But hunters and fishermen don't think wearing a PFD is cool. In a general media campaign, one must create a story that's newsworthy. One "hook" is to have an upbeat story the media can report. Celebrity spokespersons, such as those the Coast Guard has, the Labonte family, Al Unser, and John Amos are working today. Great photo ops, survivor stories, we need to think outside the box to promote the campaign. Family members, and relationships are affected by a tragedy. Arrange for an interview with law enforcement officers who have dealt with an incident, medical personnel who receive victims. She underlined the coolness of the product, and recommended consideration of the "tan" issue regarding PFD's. Her advice was to (1) know and target the audience with custom messages, (2) plan to use strategies to attract the media, (3) think out side the box, find a new angle, use high tech gear, find public relations and market partners, (4) be persistent and keep trying, and (5) timing is important such as at the beginning of the season, after an incident and hold an event.

Ted Rankine, Dual Media gave the media view. He is a member of various organizations including CSBC, and the Canadian Power Squadrons. He is also a member of the boating media, both print and television. It's a big job and we have limited resources to do it. He advised not to beat ourselves up; we've come a long way with gear and new stuff, as the statistics show. In the media, have kids in PFD's. It becomes part of the gear and looks cool. As in the PWC world, a PFD is just part of the equipment one has. The media is looking for good stories, but the boating media has a very small audience. In magazines, have people testing boats in PFD's. The National Marine Manufactures Association (NMMA) needs to look for and use a photo with PFD's displayed, people in boats with jackets on. It could start with the 2005 model year roll out, everyone with jackets on. This would probably be a huge motivation to change behavior. Today, people think PFD's look stupid, he used the pocket protector as an example of a great piece of gear that's associated with nerds. Role model behavior is key, but don't get all over the magazine because of the ads in that magazine. We need to go after the people who create and finance the ads. Get the PFD manufacturers to give stuff to magazines to gain support. There should be a PFD test kit to send to magazines that are testing boats to gain support. Magazines will probably do more supporting the campaign if they are given gifts for their testing. The National Association of Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) and other organizations should go after magazines, but not all pick on the same one. Also, go after the regular media. The magazine, Boating, has a circulation of about 200,000, pretty small potatoes. Invite the media for a boat ride; make a PFD the boarding pass.

Bob Askew, Personal Flotation Device Manufacturers Association (PFDMA) said there is a stronger acceptance of PFD's. They are focusing on the product, making it cooler and relevant to the public. He sees the issues that the consumer is confused by boating's growth over the last few years. Manufacturers are constricted by restrictive and duplicate standards, citing the 10-year period for inflatable jacket approval.

Globalization and an international standard will result in more competition. He said that the Coast Guard PFD labeling and classification study is mostly done. Risk based compliance assessment study on the Type V category, which catches ideas such as a Type V moves to a Type I or II when inflated. They are participating in international standards forums, North Americans are going to Europe with the International Standards Organization (ISO) and have been since 1988 or 16 years. Engagement of users within a consensus, like the manufacturers and the Coast Guard are bringing stakeholders to the table. The PFD Standards Technical Panel (STP) has a working group that has lots of information but its direction isn't as clear. STP is recommending that the Coast Guard and Underwriters Laboratory (UL), the test agency, Boat/US representing users, and enforcement along with retail outlets are looking for goals and recommendations. Incorporate a risk-based assessment as a viable alternative to the Type V. The first recommendation is due August 2004.

Paul Donheffner, BLA Oregon, presented the PFD wear and Law Enforcement (LE) Perspective. Enforcement and Education has been a success over the years. Boating Under the Influence (BUI), equipment has been the story in the long run. PWC rules have made PFD wearage rates high because it's mandatory. However, we have hit the barrier at 750 deaths per year in boating due to drowning and capsizing. The campaign has not done much. Children wearing PFD's because of state laws is good from a LE perspective. Carrying PFD is pretty good, and many agencies have a loaner program in case a boat doesn't have the proper jackets aboard. NASBLA wants to study the issue, is it time for mandatory wear yet? Probably not at this time. Mandatory education is present in most states, but it has been a long haul taking years to accomplish. The PFD will be a long-range issue as well. He applauded the Canadian study, re-examining boater attitudes, and the question of voluntary or mandatory. We need to build a consensus like Canada is doing, which will be much work. He is on the STP group, and learned that the application process is huge. Classification and labels must improve to help customer make choices. LE applauds these efforts, but is concerned that changing classifications will have a great effect on state laws and may contradict the education efforts we've made over the years, creating turmoil. LE doesn't really care, but a new system would be a big distraction. Wear It is the issue.

Randy Smith, National Safe Boating Campaign said that the campaign focuses on the core issue, PFD. It's a grassroots campaign trying to brand the message with logos and a simple concise statement – Boat Safe, Boat Smart, Wear It. The Campaign manual contains lots of stuff already said. PCI brings it to the national media, and have supplied tactics of how to approach the media. The National Safe Boating Council (NSBC) has tried to make it one stop shopping via their web site where one can register their event, download logos, articles, news releases, etc.

Chris Edmonston, Boat/US Sportsmen stated that sportsmen are not very receptive to the traditional safety information media. He urges use of BASS and Ducks Unlimited to spread the message to this population via TV shows, PSA's, and editorial in sporting magazines. He urges us to focus on those personal experiences by sportsmen will have a large influence, when it comes from a friend or a known personality. Sportsmen don't see a risk with our eyes. One complaint is that PFD's are not large enough for many of those participating in these activities and they don't know the options. Stearns has been good creating and marketing jackets for sportsmen, and there is opposition to mandatory wear, but that that is softening.

Bernice McArdle, PFDMA said they are shooting a PFD Wear Video, under a grant to help change behavior, persuading people that PFD's are not big and bulky. It will show a visual image of people having fun with a PFD on, and it's seeing partners. The video is 80% done and starts with a description of the types of PFD's and then some actual boating shots of the jackets in use. It's designed to help educators, and will contain some public service announcements at the end of the video.

Mr. Chambers then opened the session to the audience with two starter questions:  
What do you think can be done to increase wear and reduce drowning?  
Are there successful models for PFD wear voluntarily?

A respondent noted that on every Coast Guard Auxiliary vessel the crew wears their jackets. We must lead by example, and we all should wear out jackets.

When I work with a dealer in Vermont, there is cheap stuff in the safety kit.

U. S. Sail – I had to convince sailing instructors to wear shoes and a PFD in Hawaii. The instructors put patches on their PFD's and logos, and now kids wear the PFD's and they are teaching their parents. Start with the kids.

CGAux – During a Vessel Safety Check (VSC) we mostly have a family there with the boat. The wives are most responsive, but we don't target women, we need to look at targeting the whole family.

American Red Cross – Gear the PFD project to the whole family, in, on and around the water. The problem isn't just boats, it's on the pier, around the pool plus boats. Get the parents involved, tell kids to wear their jackets.

Canadian Office of Boating Safety – The example in Hawaii is good. In Canada in open motorboats, kids wear their jackets, but don't when they get older.

Lower Colorado River Authority – Enlist water champions in various sports. He/she thinks fishermen are aware, but get PFD and tackle manufacturers to match stuff.

Ontario Provincial Police – There is a lot of confusion about types of PFD's, Make the PFD match the activity and make the technical information invisible. The term Life Jacket is the best branding.

CGAux – Teach kids in school with Coastie (a mechanized robotic boat).

Game & Fish Department – The law says that kids must wear their jackets because they are valuable to the parents. Are not parents as valuable to the kids?

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – The target area, 30-55 year old males have to be socially acceptable to their buddies. This is a tough row to hoe. Fishing heroes must wear PFD's on their TV shows.

CGAux – Regarding the media, how many see an ad without a PFD on? Does anyone write and complain? Getting the pros to wear a PFD in an ad is important, he liked the life jacket term, and then launched into a wide array of subjects summing up that we should push a PFD as a Fathers Day gift.

CGAux – On commercial vessels one gets a safety briefing, but not on a recreational vessel.

Virginia Education Specialist – If someone is carrying many passengers, he is required to supply all the PFD's. Why not require everyone to have his or her own?

Capt. Evans, USCG – Would a huge call in to the media do anything? Answered by Ted Rankine – A large number of call-ins would be effective, but the media only controls what the editorial content is, not the advertisements. He suggests putting logos on the PFD's, everyone likes logos.

Florida Sea Grant – Commercial fishermen and Native Americans are cited for a lack of wearing PFD's. He/she cited the example of marketing a SUV, by showing it conquering a mountain. We should target commercial fishermen and that would spread to the recreational types.

Army Corps of Engineers – While on patrol they hand out lots of stuff for kids, cool stuff. Why not develop cool stuff to hand out to adults, like a whistle, gift coupon, etc.? Someone mentioned cash. Fred Messman, BLA-Nevada hands out envelopes and two of them will contain \$1000 in cash.

Someone said why not publish the faces of the 750 people who lost their lives in a boating accident. The horror and privacy of some of that were comments.

U. S. Power Squadron – Suggested that a policy to support mandatory PFD wearage has been adopted by USPS. Also suggested that we seek permission to adopt the term lifesaver from the candy company.

CGAux – She compares PFD to a cheap life insurance policy. Suggested that the policy only be paid when the victim drowned with a PFD on.

Fox 40 – Insurance business is a risk management business. Suggested that reducing a policy's payout if someone drowns without a PFD. He believes that logos are the way.

Capt. Evans, USCG – he gets a national report every day of boating accidents/deaths. He has compiled those that involved use/non-use of a PFD. Would this be helpful if posted on the CG's web site? He will check to see if this is feasible.

Ted Rankine – Said he has the solution, "Who wants to be a Millionaire?" A campaign with prizes, no purchase necessary, win a million by wearing a PFD. He claims this would be a huge draw for the media and create great publicity.

The session was concluded with many more folks wishing to give their input. Many suggested that the session should be longer to allow more debate. Others said this went better than the Miami Boat Show version, and may be repeated. There was talk of holding public hearings; one suggested that one should be held at the Summit. All in all, everyone gained a new appreciation for the subject and this has grabbed the attention of all boating interests.