

Coast Guard Considers Mandating Adult Life Jacket Wear

An advisory panel to the U.S. Coast Guard gave its go-ahead to pursue federal regulations that would require adults to wear life jackets on certain boats. The National Boating Safety Advisory Council asked the Coast Guard to consider mandating that anyone aboard a boat less than 18-feet long be required to wear a life jacket when underway. In addition it asks that all those being towed in water sports, riding personal watercraft, or in human-powered boats of any length be required to wear life jackets as well.

The 16-5 decision mirrors a trend among state boating agencies to increase the number of people actually wearing Coast Guard-approved life jackets with the aim of reducing boating fatalities. But unlike the Council recommendation, which would apply to all ages, most state laws apply just to children and specify varying age cutoffs, typically 12 and under.

The U.S. Forest Service estimates that 82 million people participated in boating in 2010 and Coast Guard statistics show 736 people died in boating accidents that year. According to a Coast Guard mathematical model, if a 70 percent wear rate was achieved, mandating boaters nationwide to wear life jackets in boats less than 18-feet could save 71 lives each year.

We want your opinion! Let us know what you think about this Coast Guard initiative at GovtAffairs@BoatUS.com. Please include whether this specific proposal impacts the boats you go on or not.