



Paddle boarding ([SUP](#)) is a fun way to get out on the water. However, when venturing out to enjoy the wonderful sport of [SUP](#), it's best to head out prepared.

Like with all water sports a personal flotation device (PFD) is an important piece of safety equipment. Several states also mandate PFDs by statute. Your age, location and situation decide what's needed, so it's always wise to consult with local authorities before heading out.

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Choosing a Life Jacket for Paddle Boarding

Why PFDs?

It is pretty straight forward, but worth remembering while standup paddle boarding. Personal flotation systems are just that, a device that makes you float. When you find yourself in the water, whether by accident or on purpose they provide you with a bit of buoyancy. Though it's pretty easy when you think about it in some situations they will save your life. For some, it's nice enough to make you safe and give you peace of mind and a bit of extra assistance when you do fall for.

Model & Types of PFDs

Because of the wide variety of water sports there's also a variety of PFDs. They come in all shapes and sizes, so you'll definitely be able to find something that suits your needs. The U.S. Coast Guard classifies PFDs into five categories. However, paddle boarders tend to stick to two of those categories, Type III and Type V.

The reason SUPers tend to stick to Type III and V PFDs is mainly due to their purpose-built design considerations, which provide a more comfortable, full-range of motion for water



sports. We'll dive into the specific Type III and V PFDs recommended for SUPers below, but if you're looking for a more detailed rundown of all the various PFD types check out the Boat U.S. Foundation or U.S. Coast Guard website. Regardless of which one you pick, long gone are the days when PFDs consisted of cork vests, plain blocks of wood, inflatable bladders or even sealed gourds. Indeed, sealed gourds!

- Vests (Type III & Type V)
- Foam Core PFDs (Type III)

The best inflatable paddle board

Some of the most common PFDs used in the SUP world is the foam core jacket. While slightly bulkier than inflatable vests they benefit from limited maintenance and reduced expense. A foam construction doesn't need any air chambers or gas cartridges to hold you afloat. Therefore the daily operation and maintenance is reduced substantially. Another big benefit that traditional vests have over inflatable vests or belts is that their size allows for pockets and storage. Of course, not all models have pockets, but not all SUPers need them. Take the time to think about the variety of things you plan on doing on your [paddle board](#) and in the water in general before making the final decision.

Why choose a Type III:

Still on defence. You don't have to activate or put on the PFD, and it's always there.

How to use:

River paddling, white water particularly, if you're a less confident swimmer, or a boy.

Cons:

Not designed to turn you upright if unconscious like Type I & Type II.

Inflatable PFDs (Type V)

Inflatable vests are a perfect choice for SUP. We consist of either a single or pair of air chambers that inflate from a built-in gas cartridge. The technology helps them achieve a compact design that makes them more relaxed and less bulky. Meaning, slimmer chest and back plates with less ribbing or belts in the sides. This in effect produces a life jacket built for a greater range of motion as opposed to typical vests.



Why choose a Type V:

Maximum range of motion and comfort.

How to use:

Tends to be the most common choice for most paddlers in good conditions.

Cons:

Will trigger, pull over your head and move while in the water.

Auto inflatable and Manual inflatable PFDs (type V)

Inflatable vests come in two types auto inflatable and manual inflatable. Manual inflatable life vests only inflate after manual activation. Typically by pulling a cord located in the front of the vest. Auto inflatable vests automatically inflate upon immersion while they can be inflated manually as well. It's important to know how much you expect to get wet because with an auto inflatable PFD you risk using the gas cartridge excessively.

Why Paddle Boarding is awesome for athletes

Unlike the more traditional foam core vests, inflatable life jackets need frequent maintenance. It of course is due to the gas cartridges that cause them to inflate. Regardless of this design feature it's recommended to test them before you go out and remove the gas cartridge annually (refer to OWNER 's MANUAL for maintenance requirements).

Inflatable Life Belts

Inflatable life belts are by far the most compact PFD available. Placed around the waist like a belt it 's easy to forget you 're even wearing one. Nonetheless, when inflated it provides similar buoyancy to other options. Unlike manual inflatable vests they allow you the user to trigger the gas cartridge by pulling on a cord. Just just like the other inflatables they need to be serviced frequently as they carry a gas cartridge.

Things to Remember While Buying

Now that you have a general understanding of the common choices for stand up paddle boarding it's time to think about what suits you. SUPers come in various shapes and sizes



with varying skill levels and interests as well as confidence with and experience on the surface. We will base our option of PFD on some of these factors.

Scale

Regardless of what sort of PFD you choose it must suit well to function properly. You could slip out of a PFD if it's too wide or find yourself excessively constricted if it's too close. Since sizing will differ between brands and models it's worth making a visit to an outfitter. However, if that's not an option do your best to get accurate measurements of your body before selecting a size.

Also keep in mind that you may be wearing your PFD over clothing. So when taking measurements yourself or trying one on at the shop consider your usual [inflatable paddle board](#) attire. You want it to fit snugly around your chest with free unrestricted movement of your arms, which will allow you to paddle freely.

The PFD market is highly diverse. There are male and female options which take into account all of our sizing needs and differences. Don't be confused by the options, the range makes for more convenient PFDs for all.

SUP Business Forms: the 3 Most Efficient to Begin an SUP Rental Business

Fit

Now that you find the right size it 's time to tailor it to the right fit. You may think size and fit are one in the same, but when it comes to PFDs they 're both critical to get correct. Find size the general range that you fit into. Whereas fit is how you make your shaped PFD right for you.

Fitting is relatively simply method, but worth taking the time to get correct. This of course can also differ PFD to PFD, so it's best to check the owner 's manual for exact instructions. However, there a few general principles to bear in mind.

As previously stated you want your PFD to be snug, but not hot. Tighten it up to make sure you can still achieve a full range of motion. Once you feel like you have that right, check to make sure your PFD can't slip too far up or down your body. When it's loose when you 're in the water it definitely won't be comfortable and might not even work properly.

When it comes down to it the final decision is up to you. While the US Coastguard PFD Type Classification System is a useful guide, make sure to check the legal requirements in your area. Your option should primarily depend on your health. However, with so many choices



you can have safety with comfort and style.

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Buy Now the Best [Inflatable Paddle Board](#) Available with Accidental Damage Protection*
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