

The PFD Question

North American Fisherman columnist Mark Damian Duda recently completed a study, in conjunction with the U.S. Coast Guard, to learn more about anglers' attitudes toward PFD usage. The study's results are to be used in a far-reaching effort to increase anglers' use of life jackets. His full report will appear next issue.

Let me back up here a moment. In the July 2000 issue, in a piece headlined "Perfect Day To Die," we shared some surprising statistics about fatal boating accidents. Gathered by the BoatU.S. Foundation, those statistics showed that an angler is three times more likely to drown in flat, calm seas than when water conditions are "rough" (waves from 2 to 6 feet) to "very rough" (wave greater than 6 feet).

After reading the piece, I considered my own PFD usage and realized that I wear a life jacket in three situations: 1. When running (kill switch cord is attached to life jacket); 2. When conditions are rough; 3. When I am cold.

Statistically, my usage pattern doesn't make sense. To take full advantage of the protection a PFD offers I should wear one continuously. So why don't I? I know PFDs save lives. In fact, my kids don't get near the water unless they're wearing a PFD. And I had a near-miss in which, had I not been wearing a PFD, I probably would have drowned.

So why do I have such a hard time wearing one? Comfort is not the issue. In fact, I own the best models currently available and can select the right one for every situation. So what is it?

Duda asked that question of several avid anglers. An interesting answer emerged. I'll quote Duda: "To many fishermen, a life jacket symbolizes childhood or inexperience. The belief that 'when you get good enough you don't need a PFD' is reinforced by images of professional anglers, TV personalities, even parents, not wearing life jackets." Gulp!

From time to time we get letters from NAFC members asking us why so few of the photos in the Club publication show anglers wearing PFDs. The easy answer is that we are in the business of recreation and escape. For some, images of anglers wearing PFDs are distractions. The toughest answer is to say we will start running some of these images... and wearing a PFD on the NAFC's television shows.

Like Wilfred Brimley says in the oatmeal commercials, "It's the right thing to do."



As always, let's keep An Open Line.

Steve Pennaz
Executive Director

P.S. The NAFC's popular television show, "North American Outdoors" begins its 12th season April 6 on ESPN2 (see page 66 for schedule). I'd like to thank show sponsors Stratos Boats, Berkley Trilene, BoatU.S. Foundation, Mathews, Federal Ammunition, Daiichi, Chevrolet Suburban, Flambeau, Knight Rifles, Cotton Cordell and Weaver for their support.