

Transport for NSW

Boating safety checklist

A guide to lifejacket and safety equipment rules on NSW waters



Wearing lifejackets for different vessels

Children and lifejackets

Children aged under 12 years must wear a lifejacket:

- on all vessels up to 4.8m long at all times
- in open areas of all vessels up to 8m long when the vessel is underway.

Powerboats and sailing boats

These lifejacket rules cover all powerboats and sailing boats, including tenders and off-the-beach sailing boats.

Up to 4.8m long

Everyone must wear a lifejacket:

| Enclosed waters | Alpine waters | Open waters and crossing coastal bars |
|--|--------------------|--|
| At night (between sunset and sunrise) Or When alone on your boat (including when you have children aged under 12 on your boat) | At all times | At all times |
| Level 50S or above | Level 50S or above | Level 100 or above. Level 50S for off-the beach sailing boats |

Over 4.8m long

Everyone must wear a Level 100 lifejacket or above when crossing coastal bars.

Personal watercraft (PWC)

Everyone must wear a Level 50S or above lifejacket at all times on a PWC. This includes the driver, passengers, observer, and any person being towed.

Inflatable lifejackets are not recommended when you're driving a PWC.

When towing

A person being towed by a vessel must wear a Level 50S or above lifejacket at all times. This includes wakesurfers and tow-in surfers.

Inflatable lifejackets are not recommended when you're being towed.

Sailboards and kiteboards

People on sailboards and kiteboards must wear a lifejacket when more than 400m from the shore:

| Enclosed waters | Alpine waters | Open waters and crossing coastal bars |
|--|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| At night (between sunset and sunrise) Or When alone on your sailboard or kiteboard (including when you have children aged under 12 on your sailboard or kiteboard) | At all times | At all times |
| Level 50S or above | Level 50S or above | Level 50S or above |

Paddlecraft

Canoes and kayaks

People in canoes (including outrigger canoes) and kayaks must wear a lifejacket:

| Enclosed waters | Alpine waters | Open waters and crossing coastal bars |
|--|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| At night (between sunset and sunrise) Or When alone on your canoe or kayak (including when you have children aged under 12 on your canoe or kayak) | At all times | At all times |
| Level 50S or above | Level 50S or above | Level 50S or above |

Surf skis

It's recommended that people using a surf ski wear a lifejacket at all times.

If your surf ski is up to 4.8m long, you must follow the same rules as for powerboats and sailing boats up to 4.8m long.

There is an exception for surf club members involved in lifesaving, training or competition – unless the event organiser says you must wear a lifejacket.

Stand-up paddle boards

It's recommended that people using stand-up paddle boards (SUPs) wear a lifejacket. If this is not possible, it's recommended that you use a leg rope so you do not get separated from your board.

Rowing vessels

People in rowing boats, rowing dinghies, rowing skiffs, dragon boats or small unpowered inflatable boats must wear a lifejacket:

| Enclosed waters | Alpine waters | Open waters and crossing coastal bars |
|--|--------------------|--|
| At night (between sunset and sunrise) Or When alone on your vessel (including when you have children aged under 12 on your vessel) | At all times | At all times |
| Level 50S or above | Level 50S or above | Level 100 or above. Level 50S for off-the beach sailing boats |

People in rowing (racing) shells do not have to wear a lifejacket on enclosed waters. However, it is recommended that you wear a Level 50S or above lifejacket when not taking part in organised events and activities.



You must always wear a lifejacket in a canoe or kayak when alone in your vessel.

When to wear a lifejacket

Lifejackets are the most important item of safety equipment on any recreational vessel. Wearing a lifejacket can save your life and it's recommended that you wear one at all times.

Lifejackets are also known as personal flotation devices or PFDs.

There are rules for when you must wear a lifejacket and what type.

These rules depend on:

- your age – there are special rules for children aged under 12 years
- the level of risk
- the type of vessel you're in
- where you are – for example, enclosed waters, alpine waters, open waters or crossing coastal bars
- what time of day you're on the water.





















There are different types of lifejackets – for example, Level 50, Level 50S and Level 100.

Heightened risk

As well as the specific rules for different types of vessels, you must wear a lifejacket when the skipper tells you to. This may be at times of heightened risk, for example:

- when there's a gale, storm, severe thunderstorm or other severe weather warning from the Bureau of Meteorology
- when there are passengers who are elderly, are nonswimmers or have a serious medical condition
- if the vessel is in danger of capsizing or being swamped by waves
- if people on the vessel are in danger of falling overboard or being forced to enter the water
- when cold water temperatures are likely
- if the vessel has broken down
- on sailing boats without safety barriers, lifelines, rails, safety harnesses or jack lines.

Safety equipment checklist

| | Equipment you must carry on powerboats and sailing boats of any size (except tenders and off-the-beach sailing boats) | Enclosed waters (including alpine waters) | Open waters |
|---|---|---|-----------------------------------|
|  | Lifejacket. For each person on board – also see When to wear a lifejacket. | 1 | 1 |
|  | Anchor and chain/line. Except for sailing boats up to 6m long. | 1 | 1 |
|  | Bailer or bucket with lanyard. Except for sailing boats with permanently enclosed, self-draining hulls. | 1 | 1 |
|  | Bilge pump (electric or manual). For vessels with covered bilge or closed underfloor compartments (other than airtight void spaces). Must be able to drain each compartment. Larger vessels may need additional bilge pumps. | 1 | 1 |
|  | Chart (map). For area of operation (printed or digital). | – | 1 |
|  | Compass. Fluid filled magnetic. | – | 1 |
|  | Distress flares. Not expired. | – | 2 orange smoke 2 red hand |
|  | Drinking water. | – | 2 litres per person |
|  | EPIRB – 406 MHz. Must be registered with AMSA and not expired. | – | 1 (if 2nm or more from the shore) |
|  | Fire extinguisher. For boats with electric start, electric engines, battery, gas installation or fuel stoves. Larger boats may need additional fire extinguishers. | 1 | 1 |
|  | Marine radio. | – | 1 (if 2nm or more from the shore) |
|  | Paddles or oars and rowlocks. For boats up to 6m long, unless they have a second means of propulsion. | 1 | |
|  | Safety label. Except for sailing boats. | 1 | 1 |
|  | Sound signal. Air horn, whistle or bell. | 1 | 1 |
|  | V sheet. A minimum of 1.8m x 1.2m. | – | 1 |
|  | Waterproof torch. Floating and working. | 1 | 1 |
| Recommended equipment | | | |
|  | First-aid kit. | 1 | 1 |
|  | Kill switch lanyard. For small powerboats. | 1 | 1 |
|  | Toolkit. | 1 | 1 |
|  | 2 means of communication. For example, a marine radio and mobile phone in a waterproof cover. | – | 1 |

Personal watercraft (PWC)

PWC must have a PWC behaviour label. The label must be displayed where it can be seen from the steering position. This label shows the rules you must follow when driving a PWC, such as keeping a safe distance from people and other vessels. You get one when you register your PWC at a service centre.

You must wear a lifejacket on a PWC at all times.

For your safety, especially in remote areas and on open waters, it's recommended that you carry:

- kill switch lanyard (strongly recommended)
- torch (waterproof and working)
- first-aid kit
- fire extinguisher
- 2 means of communication – for example, a marine radio and a mobile phone in a waterproof cover
- wetsuit for each person
- helmet for each person.

When tow-in surfing

If you're tow-in surfing without an observer on a PWC, you must carry:

- rescue sled
- spare kill switch lanyard – wrapped around the handlebar
- two-way communication device – such as a marine radio or mobile phone in a waterproof cover
- dive fins
- safety knife
- toolkit
- quick-release floating tow rope (minimum 7m long)
- bow tow-line (minimum 7m long).

Sailboards, kiteboards and off-the-beach sailing boats

You must carry lifejackets for each person on board – also see When to wear a lifejacket.

If you're going out alone to remote areas or on open waters, it's strongly recommended that you carry a minimum of 1 means of communication, such as a mobile phone in a waterproof cover.

Paddlecraft

Canoes and kayaks

You must carry:

- lifejackets for each person on board – see When to wear a lifejacket
- waterproof torch if you go out at night (between sunset and sunrise) to use to help prevent a collision.

For your safety, it's recommended that you:

- wear highly visible clothing
- attach a high-visibility flag to your vessel
- carry a handheld marine radio or mobile phone in a waterproof cover in case of an emergency.

Paddling activities on open waters – such as sea kayaking – demand a high level of self-sufficiency and skill.

See the 'Safety Guidelines' provided by Paddle Australia at paddle.org.au

On open waters, canoes and kayaks with an engine must carry the same safety equipment as powerboats and sailing boats.

Surf skis

You must carry lifejackets for each person onboard, unless you are involved in council or surf club lifesaving, training or competition activities. See When to wear a lifejacket.

Stand-up paddle boards

It's strongly recommended that people on stand-up paddle boards wear a lifejacket.

Rowing vessels

Rowing boats, rowing dinghies, rowing skiffs and small inflatable boats

You must carry lifejackets for each person on board – see When to wear a lifejacket on.

You must carry the same safety equipment as powerboats and sailing boats.

You do not have to carry safety equipment if your vessel is all of the following:

- up to 3m long
- not carrying an engine or fuel
- built to float if swamped or capsized
- within 200m of the nearest shore.

If the boat is being used as a tender, you must carry the safety equipment for a tender.

Rowing (racing) shells

You do not have to carry safety equipment or lifejackets on enclosed waters.

Dragon boats and outrigger canoes

Dragon boats and outrigger canoes have special rules for the safety equipment they must carry, how it's stored and safety drills. See Marine Safety Regulation 2016 Schedule 8, Part 2 (clause 8 for outrigger canoes and clause 9 for dragon boats) at legislation.nsw.gov.au

Vessels used for competition, training or surf rescue

Surf rescue boats (except PWC) do not have to carry safety equipment, and people on board do not have to wear lifejackets, when they are being used by a local council or recognised rescue organisation for:

- lifesaving
- surf rescue
- training or competition.

Sailing vessels used for organised sailing training do not have to carry safety equipment – as long as a powered vessel capable of rescue is close by. Everyone must wear a lifejacket.

Tenders

A tender is any type of boat up to 7.5m long used to transport people or goods between the shore and a parent vessel or another vessel. It is no longer classified as a tender if it travels further than 1nm from its parent vessel.

Tenders up to 3m long

A tender up to 3m long must carry:

- paddle or oars
- bucket, bailer or bilge pump
- waterproof torch at night (between sunset and sunrise).

A tender must carry the same equipment as powerboats and sailing boats if it goes:

- more than 200m from the shore on enclosed waters
- anywhere on open waters.

Tenders over 3m long

A tender over 3m long must carry the same safety equipment as powerboats and sailing boats.

Recommended safety equipment

In addition to the essential safety equipment that you must carry, it's recommended that you carry these items on board at all times.

First-aid kit

Carry a complete first-aid kit appropriate for the maximum number of people the vessel is designed to carry.

Kill switch lanyard

Many small powerboats and all personal watercraft (PWC) have an automatic engine cut-off device called a kill switch. This is activated by a lanyard.

When you're driving, you attach one end of the kill switch lanyard to your arm, leg, clothing or lifejacket, and the other end to the engine. If you fall overboard or lose control of the steering, the lanyard disconnects and stops the engine.

It's strongly recommended that you wear a kill switch lanyard when the engine is on and in gear.

Toolkit

It's recommended that every vessel have a basic toolkit with:

- spark plug spanner and spark plugs (for petrol engines)
- small adjustable spanner
- pair of pliers
- metal file
- wire brush
- hacksaw and blade
- Phillips head and standard screwdriver
- spare fuel line
- electrical wiring
- insulation tape
- can of water-displacing spray.

Two means of communication

If possible, carry 2 means of communication, for example, a marine radio and a mobile phone in a waterproof cover.

Carrying lifejackets

Vessels must carry enough approved lifejackets for everyone on board at all times – even when they do not have to be worn.

Lifejackets must be stored for quick and easy access on board.

If they're not easy to see, the storage area must have a sign saying 'Lifejackets' (red lettering on a white background). You can get a free sticker from your nearest service centre.

Approved types of lifejacket

There's a wide range of lifejackets to suit different activities and conditions.

Lifejackets are grouped into safety levels based on their buoyancy, performance and what they're intended to be used for.

These levels help you choose a lifejacket that suits your situation, the type of activity you choose and the conditions you might experience, and that meets the legal requirements for when you must wear a lifejacket.

These levels have replaced the old type 1, 2 or 3 lifejackets used before the introduction of the Marine Safety Regulation 2016 in October 2016. You can still use the old types as long as they're in good condition and well maintained. However, it's recommended that you upgrade to the newer lifejackets with improved safety features. All lifejackets must meet certain standards – see 'Lifejacket standards' at nsw.gov.au

Recreational vessels must carry a lifejacket for each person on board. They must be the right level, the right size, in good condition and easy to find.

For more information



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