

LAW ENFORCEMENT CHECKLIST FOR INSPECTING INFLATABLE PFDs

OBJECTIVE:

To impress on boaters that it is their responsibility, and in their interest, to ensure that their PFDs will work when needed, and to educate boaters on the steps that will ensure that inflatables will work.

PHILOSOPHY/METHOD

For an inflatable PFD to be serviceable it must be equipped with:

- (1) A properly armed inflation mechanism, complete with a full CO₂ cartridge and all status indicators showing that the inflation mechanism is properly armed (If the PFD is worn inflated and meets requirements 2-4 listed below, then it does not need to be armed.);
- (2) Inflatable chambers that are all capable of holding air;
- (3) Functional oral inflation tubes that are not blocked, detached, or broken;
- (4) A manual inflation lanyard or lever that is not inaccessible, broken, or missing; and
- (5) Inflator status indicators that are not broken or otherwise non-functional.

1. CHECKS:

As with all PFDs:

- Metal or plastic hardware used to secure the PFD to the wearer must not be broken, deformed or weakened by corrosion.
- Webbing or straps used to secure the PFD to the wearer must not be ripped, torn or separated from an attachment point on the PFD.
- Any rotted or deteriorated structural components must not fail when tugged. (Note: Do not tug on the inflation lanyard.)

For inflatable PFDs:

- The inflation mechanism must be properly armed (unless it is being worn inflated). This means that all inflation indicators are green. If you find a red indicator, then it is not properly armed.
- The inflation lanyard must be accessible. It can not be wrapped around the cylinder or hidden inside PFD folds, but must hang freely from the PFD.

2. **QUESTIONS:** If the boater demonstrates a good working knowledge of the PFDs by answering the following questions, the above checks should be needed. If not, additional checks will help demonstrate the steps necessary for safe use of inflatable PFDs.

- When was the last time you tested your PFD for leaks as indicated in the owner's manual?
- What method did you use to conduct that test? (Some possible methods the boater could use are leaving the PFD inflated overnight and checking for firmness the next morning, holding underwater and watching for bubbles, or inflating it and firmly squeezing it for 30 seconds, checking for a change in firmness or listening for escaping gas.)
- Did you check the CO₂ cylinder before this outing to make sure that it has not been used?
- Does your PFD inflate automatically? (If answered yes, then ask the following questions)
 - If you have used it in the water, has the water sensitive element been replaced?
 - What is the manufacturer's recommended replacement interval?

3. **ADDITIONAL CHECKS:** If the boater's response to the above types of questions indicates that he or she is not knowledgeable about inflatable PFDs, the following additional checks are recommended in proportion to the level of understanding demonstrated. Inflator status indicators should normally always be checked:

- Check CO₂ Cylinder: Does it have the correct gram weight of CO₂ as specified on the vest?

Have the boater unscrew it and show you that it doesn't have a hole in the seal end. Always immediately reinstall the cylinder, hand tight only!

- Have the boater orally inflate the PFD (CO₂ inflation is OK at the boater's option). Either squeeze the PFD very firmly for 30 seconds and check for a change in firmness of the PFD, or hold it under water and check for bubbles. (Caution: All bubbles may not come out of the inflation chamber, but a steady stream of bubbles usually indicates a problem.)

4. BOATER EDUCATION

- Inflatables are not intended for weak or non-swimmers, since a failure of the CO₂ inflation mechanism in the water requires the wearer to be able to orally inflate the PFD while treading water.
- Inflatables are not to be used by children under 16 years of age, or anyone weighing under 80 pounds. [Check the label for a non-standard weight range.]
- Inflatables are not to be used on PWCs, for water-skiing, knee-boarding, etc.
- PFDs being worn orally-inflated can be damaged by CO₂ inflation. The CO₂ cylinder can be removed to prevent accidental over-inflation.