

To: All NMMA Member Boat and Engine Manufacturers  
From: Thom Dammrich  
Subject: Modeling Safe Boating Behavior, and Promoting Boating Education  
Date: April 18, 2005

### **Issue**

The Personal Flotation Device Manufacturers Association (PFDMA - an NMMA Affiliate), is in the final stages of implementing a Coast Guard grant to promote increased use of life jackets through a video and educational package for widespread distribution in the boating safety community. An important part of this grant project is engaging industry in more proactive promotion of the life jacket wear message to their customers.

***Note: The priority target audiences for life jacket wear are anglers, paddlers, personal watercraft enthusiasts, children, and smaller day cruisers. However, we encourage all boat and engine manufacturers to adopt as many of these guidelines as possible to help shift boater attitudes and create a broader acceptance of life jacket wear while above deck on any boat that is under way.***

NMMA seeks your active involvement in encouraging boaters to wear life jackets by positively modeling this behavior in your promotional photos, brochures, ads and boat show displays. Attached are a set of guidelines and specific suggestions your company can implement to help support this safety initiative.

In addition, we know that boaters who have taken a boating safety course are far safer boaters, which improves everyone's experience on the water. Please use the information provided in your product literature to encourage your customers to take a US Power Squadron or US Coast Guard Auxiliary Boating Safety Course.

### **Background**

Drowning remains the single most prevalent cause of boating fatalities, and each year the Coast Guard data shows that approximately 8 out of 10 of these victims are not wearing a life jacket. Wearing a life jacket is the single most important precaution boaters can take to ensure their personal on-water safety. Yet, actual wear rates among adults remain stubbornly low. Like seat belts, life jackets only work when worn.

Improvement will require a concerted industry effort to shift attitudes about wearing life jackets — comparable to the initiatives mounted several decades ago to convince auto passengers to wear seat belts and more recently, bicycle riders to wear helmets.

With an abundance of consumer advertising and image-oriented messages at their disposal, boat and engine manufacturers are in a strong position to influence **perceptions** about life jacket use. By positively modeling boaters wearing today's selection of attractive, comfortable life jackets in their promotional pictures, brochures, ads and boat show displays, the industry can collectively have a significant impact on overcoming the resistance and negative attitudes associated with wearing life jackets.

### **Why it Makes Sense to Get on Board:**

- The issue of mandatory life jacket wear for adult boaters in boats of 21' and less has been a recent topic of discussion in boating safety circles. A federal law already requires children 13 and under to wear life jackets. NMMA advocates education rather than mandatory regulation on this issue, however, our position must be credibly supported by a serious demonstration of industry commitment to **shifting boater attitudes** about life jackets.
- Concerns about safety represent an identified barrier to boating for new prospects. Improving boating safety is everyone's business.
- Promoting use of life jackets and boater education is part of sound business strategy.
- When most people think life jackets, they think orange & uncomfortable. But today there are hundreds of types of life jackets to choose from, designed for comfort, style, functionality and specific types of on-water activities. We need your help and marketing reach in **changing perceptions** about life jackets.

In 2001, the NMMA and BMD boards passed a resolution that encouraged NMMA boat and engine members to incorporate life jackets in their ads and promotional literature where possible, as well as basic information on where to find boating safety courses. If you have not yet taken action on this resolution, we urge you to do so now. Attached you will find a variety of suggestions from PFDMA to help your company implement this resolution.

The US Coast Guard has undertaken a strategic initiative to increase the life jacket wear rate to 42% by the year 2007 (currently at 24%). We all have a part to play in helping to move the needle, and we thank you for YOUR efforts.

## Boat & Engine Manufacturer Recommendations to Promote Life Jacket Use, and Boater Education

### ***ACTIONS YOUR COMPANY CAN UNDERTAKE TO HELP MAKE LIFE JACKETS AND BOATER EDUCATION AN ACCEPTED PART OF BOATING.***

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#### **Product Promotion**

**While underway**, picture the passengers on board your boats wearing life jackets in your ads, product literature, catalogs, videos, etc. Additionally anglers who are stationary fishing, or hunters who are stationary in their boats should be shown wearing life jackets.

- Showcase life jackets in a positive way in your marketing materials:
  - > Highlight trendy, comfortable life jacket styles suited to typical lifestyle activities aboard your boats (fishing, waterskiing, cruising, etc.)
  - > Show modern styles and colors
  - > Make sure life jackets are properly fitted and fastened (particularly on children). Unfastened, over-sized, uncomfortable life jackets send the wrong message.
- Help build NMMA's library of photos and video footage with boaters wearing life jackets. Each year, member manufacturers are invited to share current footage, CD images and still photos of their products for potential inclusion in advertising and promotional projects for the Discover Boating campaign, NMMA boat shows, and other consumer/event advertising (life jackets required). Footage is also used to produce B-roll for use in television videos produced for promoting boating to national media. Get extra mileage for your promotional images by submitting copies to NMMA's marketing department. Contact Kari Straley at 312.946.6204 or kstraley@nmma.org for details.

#### **Media Relations**

NMMA is also enlisting the boating media to help shift attitudes about life jacket wear. A common complaint from editors is that there are not enough "high quality" photos showing boaters wearing life jackets available for use in their magazines. You can help address this issue in the following ways:

- **Press Kits**

Make sure the new product photos you include in your press kits include shots with boaters wearing life jackets.

- **Boat Tests**

When boating journalists are testing and photographing your product, make sure everyone aboard is wearing attractive, trendy life jackets. The photos resulting from these product reviews are likely to be the ones that appear in the major boating magazines.

### **Advertising Agencies or In-house Marketing Team**

- Implementing these promotional ideas requires cooperation from your in-house marketing teams or ad agencies, which may resist the idea of including life jackets in your product literature. Resistance because of concerns that life jackets interfere with the message of fun and freedom plays a part in perpetuating outdated attitudes about life jackets. Some of your creative team may need convincing that selling boats and fun is not inconsistent with safety.

#### **Boating Safety Education:**

Boating Safety is everyone's responsibility. Knowing the rules of boating is one of the best ways to avoid danger. Please also include a message in your promotional and marketing materials strongly urging the need for a boating education course. **SUGGESTED MESSAGE: *Boat Smart from the Start! Take a boating education course, and get a vessel safety check for your boat. For more information, contact:***

***U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary: Tel. 877-875-6296/800-368-5647 or [www.cgaux.org](http://www.cgaux.org)***

***U.S. Power Squadrons: Tel. 888-367-8777 or [www.usps.org](http://www.usps.org)***

### **Events**

- **Boat Shows**

NMMA boat shows attract close to 1 million consumers each year and represent an important venue for interfacing with consumers and creating impressions about current trends. Visibly including life jackets as part of your boat displays is a subtle way of reinforcing the message about life jackets as standard gear.

- **Boating & Angling Celebrities**

If you retain angling celebrities or other popular boating experts as seminar speakers and boat show guests, please ask them to wear a life jacket -- and if possible, to endorse wearing life jackets -- during their presentation. Respected boating celebrities provide excellent role models.

- **Demos**

If your company offers demo days, make sure your boats are equipped with a selection of current life jackets (as opposed to the orange, "compliance" life jackets). This is an ideal opportunity to demonstrate that today's life jackets are attractive, functional and comfortable to wear for extended periods.

### ▪ **Tournaments / Owner Rendezvous**

If you sponsor fishing tournaments, regattas or other owner rendezvous events, make life jackets standard gear for your personnel and for “company boats.”

### **Branded Life Jackets**

- Consider branding life jackets with your company logo for photo shoots and events, and for possible addition to your accessory line. Boat manufacturers already know that boat owners can be some of the most enthusiastic ambassadors of their brands and are often eager to “wear” the brand on their personal clothing and gear. As an added encouragement for your customers to wear their life jackets, consider working with a life jacket manufacturer to create a life jacket branded with your logo for customers, media, celebrities, sponsored events, demo boats, sales people, etc. Today’s life jackets offer numerous options, including models styled as inflatable belt packs, vests, and other outer wear jackets that don’t even look like life jackets.

### **Owners Manuals & Kits**

- PFDMA has produced a fresh, updated version of its consumer brochure on lifejackets (“Facts About Lifejackets”) including information on life jacket types, new inflatable options, tips on selection and proper fit, care and maintenance and special issues concerning children. Consider including this professionally produced brochure in your owner’s kits (approximately \$0.20per copy, depending on volume).
- Alternatively, incorporate a turn-key up-to-date section on life jackets in your owner’s manuals. Attractively produced by PFDMA with current information and visually-appealing art-work, this insert contains the latest details on inflatable life jackets, Coast Guard requirements, types, etc.

### **“Standard” Equipment on Boats**

Consider including a set of modern life jackets as standard safety equipment on your new boats. Cost may be raised as an objection to this idea, but it is really a matter of correct positioning and perceived value. (Boaters don’t hesitate to specify premium stereos, fish finders, etc. for their boats at significantly more cost than a set of quality life jackets.) And as witnessed in the auto industry, safety items such as air bags and anti-lock brakes command a premium, and over time, have become an expected part of the base package.

- Alternatively, you might consider offering discount coupons in cooperation with a retailer, or some other incentive, to motivate consumers to equip their boats with a comfortable, quality set of life jackets they are likely to wear.

### **Final Note**

NMMA would like to formally recognize boat and engine manufacturers who are supporting the life jacket wear message. Please send copies of promotional materials and printed literature that show you are adopting a proactive approach to promoting safety to Bernice McArdle at NMMA ([bmcardle@nmma.org](mailto:bmcardle@nmma.org)). For more information about the Coast Guard Grant PFD initiative, and about life jackets in general, visit the PFDMA’s website at [www.pfdma.org](http://www.pfdma.org)