

FLOTATION DEVICES

Flotation devices are NOT allowed in the pool at any time. During the course of the summer, there will be Aquatic Facility users wishing to use floating devices in the pools. Much information supports the claim that personal flotation devices are more dangerous when used as swimming aids, especially for children, than swimming without a flotation device. The United States Coast Guard Marine Safety Office, which approves personal flotation devices and regulates and requires their use in boats and recommends that personal flotation devices not be used for recreational swimming. They claim that personal flotation devices are designed primarily as life-saving devices, to provide flotation in case of accident or emergency, and that they are not intended for use for recreational swimming.

The problem in allowing children to use personal flotation devices as a recreational aid while swimming is that they do not have the weight in their legs, the muscle control, or the knowledge to stay upright with a preserver. Children also become dependent on the preserver, and when floating into deeper water, lack the ability to maneuver back to water shallow enough so that they can touch bottom. Personal flotation devices tend to encourage children to venture into deeper water, or further from the wall, that the ability would permit otherwise. This situation poses a danger in itself, and in the fact that the preserver gives the child and his parents a false feeling of safety and security. The best solution to the problem is not in personal flotation devices, but in teaching children how to swim. Swimming lessons, to develop the ability and confidence, along with teaching a child the dangers of water so that he/she knows the limitations of his/her ability, are the best measures that can be taken to prevent drowning. Life preservers actually compound that problem as a child becomes dependent on the preserver. The personal flotation device also presents a number of problems for the lifeguard. The first is that the lifeguard would have no control over the types of preservers being worn – quality, fit, etc. Enforcement of any regulations specifying that life preservers must be Coast Guard approved, the correct size, or worn properly would be extremely difficult to enforce. A great deal of time would have to be spent in enforcement, and additional guards would probably have to be hired to provide adequate coverage.

Secondly, lifeguards would have no control over who could wear personal flotation devices. If they were allowed at all, in all practicality, they must be allowed for all people. Children too small to wear preservers safely, and older persons unable to swim would be most endangered.

Permitting children to wear personal flotation devices may make parents feel comfortable in leaving their children alone, when this should be discouraged. A child should only be allowed to swim without parental or equivalent supervision if he/she is an experienced swimmer and you are confident of his/her judgment, his/her knowledge of, and respect for the water and his/her ability to swim. No one should ever swim alone as a matter of safety.

In summary, though common sense seems to tell us that permitting personal flotation devices will save lives, to the contrary, information from experts and other research tells us that they create more danger than they alleviate.

EXCEPTION: The use of flotation devices is limited to those individuals that are physically challenged and who utilize a Coast Guard approved flotation device.** This rule includes rubber rafts, inner tubes, water wings, and swim suits with inner tubes in them, or attached to them.