

## Inflatable PFDs – The Comfortable Alternative

The best Personal Flotation Device (PFD) is the one you wear. This is a common expression in boating safety. Over the last several years, great advances have been made in the design, comfort and performance of PFDs. The result is that you have better choices when it comes to picking the PFD that will keep you safe on or near the water.

We've all heard the many reasons why people didn't want to wear traditional foam PFDs. Common complaints are they are too bulky, downright ugly, too hot to keep on, and not to mention they get in the way of enjoying your time on the water. As spring approaches and we all get ready for another great season on the water we wanted to share some information on the latest gear that will keep you safe and will let you fully enjoy your time on the water.

The newest generation of PFDs are Inflatable Personal Flotation Devices – often referred to as inflatables. They are much more comfortable to wear, stylish and won't get in the way of your favorite boating activity. Whether you're reeling in the big one, cruising, or paddling to your next destination, inflatables will give you excellent protection in case the unexpected happens. When inflated, they give you almost twice the flotation of a traditional life jacket.

If you are considering an Inflatable PFD you have to be aware that they must be worn in order to meet the Coast Guard carriage requirement. Researchers and designers at Mustang Survival put a great deal of thought into the design and fit of inflatables. Most people will tell you that they are so comfortable you'll forget you have one on. They are lightweight (less than 2 pounds), have a low-profile, are flexible and are designed not to interfere with what you're doing. You can wear them over your t-shirt, and the comfortable neoprene collar won't irritate your neck. When considering the purchase of an inflatable PFD, try it on for comfort. Not all PFDs fit the same, and manufacturers keep making improvements. It is important to pick the one that best fits you.

So who can use an inflatable PFD? If you're over the age of 16 and weigh more than 80 lb, you may. Whether you will be fishing, power boating or enjoying just about any activity on or near the water, you should consider wearing an inflatable PFD. They are universally sized and fit a chest measurement of up to 52".

How do they work? Each PFD has an inflator mechanism that triggers the carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) cylinder inside it to fill the inflatable cell or bladder. Once inflated it provides twice the flotation of a traditional life jacket and can self-right a wearer. It also increases your freeboard, the distance between your mouth and the water, which in turn reduces the risk of ingesting water.

Inflatable PFDs come with either manual or automatic activation. The manual version inflates by pulling the jerk tab that hangs from the PFD at waist-height.

The automatic version inflates when it gets immersed in water. This means if you fall overboard your automatic inflatable will inflate within seconds of you being in the water. Choosing whether a manual or automatic is the best for you will depend on the type of activity. Manuals are perfect for when there is a reasonable chance that you will end up in the water, but you're confident that you'll be able to pull the inflation cord when you need it. For example when paddling, kayaking, or wade fishing. Automatics are your best choice if you don't expect to end up in the water, but want the confidence that if the unexpected happens, the PFD will inflate within seconds of being in the water. For example, on a sailboat or a powerboat.

So how does the cell get inflated so quickly? When you inflate a manual PFD by pulling the tab hanging from the PFD, your pull causes a small pin to pierce the CO<sub>2</sub> cylinder that fills the inflatable bladder to capacity.

An automatic inflatable works differently. When you hit the water, a small yellow tablet that dissolves on water contact releases a spring-loaded pin that punctures the CO<sub>2</sub>. You can also inflate the PFD manually by pulling the tab hanging from the PFD.

One concern that people have about the water soluble bobbin is that it could inflate inadvertently if it gets wet or damp from heavy rain, wash/spray or exposure to high humidity, without being immersed in water. This phenomenon can typically be prevented by storing the PFD in a dry and well-ventilated place after use, and by replacing the bobbin every one to three years, depending on the humidity exposure.

Mustang Survival has introduced a new inflatable PFD that uses hydrostatic technology that won't inflate in high humidity conditions. This new Hydrostatic Inflator Technology (HiT), that is exclusive to Mustang, uses a water pressure valve that only opens if it has been immersed in 4 or more inches of water. You could be fishing in the pouring rain, 90% humidity, or storing your PFD in a locker, it simply won't inflate unless you go in the water.

This new inflator is maintenance free for 5 years (unless it has been inflated) and you can easily see its status and the recommended replacement date through the safety inspection window. If the inflator status indicator is showing green you know it's good to go!

Inflatable PFDs are quite stylish and come in a variety of bright, dark and camouflage colors, but once the PFD is inflated you will see that the cell or bladder inside is bright yellow, has SOLAS reflective tape, and an attachment loop for an optional strobe light. This all makes it easy to spot someone in the water. This is why before and after pictures of inflatables look very different. It also has a whistle you can use to alert rescuers, plus you can attach an optional strobe light to the inflation tube.

When you own an inflatable PFD you should check it between outings to make sure that it is in good working condition when you take it on a trip. Just take a few seconds to check the green indicator in the safety inspection window, ensure the PFD is free of rips, tears or holes, and that the Velcro™ or SecureZip™ closures are fully closed.

We recommend you do some preventative maintenance a few times during the year to be sure your inflatable is in full working order. Use the oral inflation tube (behind the cover) to fill the PFD to capacity and leave over night. The inflated cell should be just as firm in the morning as it was the night before.

If you are using an automatically inflating PFD that uses a bobbin you should probably replace the bobbin at the end of every season to prevent an inadvertent inflation. They are very inexpensive and have a shelf life of around 3 years. Full maintenance details are included in the Owner's Manual.

If the unexpected happens and you end up in the water with an inflated PFD, rest assured, it is completely reusable. Once you have let it dry and removed the air from it, you'll need a re-arm kit, which are available from most marine stores. For a manual version you'll only need a CO2 cylinder, for an automatic version you'll also need a new bobbin, or new hydrostatic inflator. It is a simple process and the kits include everything you need. Instructions on how to re-arm your PFD are included in your PFD manual, with the re-arm kit, and together with instructional videos on our website at [www.mustangsurvival.com](http://www.mustangsurvival.com).

If you are looking to purchase a new PFD this year, give inflatables a close look. They are a great way to enjoy your favorite activity on the water and stay safe.