

About Our Methods

Analysis of Personal Flotation Device Policies in 10 States

Project Objective

To collate and assess existing personal flotation device (PFD) policies in 10 states - Alaska, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Michigan, New York, Oklahoma and Texas.

Methods

The project team conducted a comprehensive assessment and collation of enacted state-level policies regarding PFD use for recreational water activities.

Data Collection and Management

One team member used the Westlaw Edge library to search for existing (current as of June 30, 2024) state-level PFD policies in 10 states - Alaska, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Michigan, New York, Oklahoma and Texas.

State policies including statutes and regulations were identified using the search strings "lifejacket" or "personal flotation device". After an initial review and content analysis of the identified legal documents, only relevant documents with the legislation of interest were included. PFD policies relating to competitive sporting activities or commercial use such as fishing were excluded from the assessment.

A second team member conducted a sensitivity test by randomly selecting five of the 10 states to search for relevant policies and comparing findings. The final scoped results remained the same. When available, Westlaw results were compared to publicly available PFD policies on state or legislative websites as a secondary source of data validation.

A total of 377 legal documents were reviewed and 289 were excluded because they did not include relevant policies. The remaining 88 legal documents were included for assessment and then uploaded to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Public Health Law Information Portal for coding and validation.

Coding and Validation

To ensure the important components of each policy were reviewed, the two team members used feedback from drowning prevention subject matter experts and findings from a literature review on evidence-based interventions to guide the development of a codebook. The major thematic areas that emerged were the type of PFD required onboard, length of vessel to which the policy applies, PFD requirements for children, PFD requirements for recreational boating activities and enforcement.

Two team members reviewed and independently coded the policies from the 10 states. The two team members resolved discrepancies through a discussion to reach consensus.

Analysis

The results of the coding were exported as an Excel spreadsheet and cleaned. Findings were summarized in a table. A "notes" column for each jurisdiction was added to document additional information that was not captured in the standardized thematic results. This legal mapping process identified key features of each state's PFD policy and how they varied across the 10 states.

Glossary

Personal Flotation Device (PFD):

A piece of safety equipment designed to keep a person afloat in water by providing buoyancy. A PFD can be wearable or throwable.

Life jacket:

A type of wearable PFD.
