



## Life Preserver Ordinance FAQ's

**Q: What is this ordinance?**

A: This ordinance says that it is unlawful for parents or guardians to allow a child under the age of thirteen (13) to access any public water within the county unless the child is wearing an approved life preserver.

**Q: Why was this ordinance passed?**

A: All too often, safety officials have reported that many near accidents and fatalities along the rivers in the Sacramento area could have been avoided if the victim had been wearing a life preserver. This ordinance is intended to bring about a higher level of public awareness and that personal flotation devices, when used properly, save lives. This law is intended to motivate adults to be more diligent in protecting children while in public waterway recreation areas and swimming areas in general.

**Q: What area does this ordinance cover?**

A: Any of the public waters within the unincorporated area of Sacramento County. This includes all parts of the American and Sacramento Rivers within the County accessible to the public, and other public waterways as well.

**Q: What is the age requirement?**

A: This ordinance applies to parents and guardians of children under the age of thirteen.

**Q: Are any of the other area cities planning to implement something similar?**

A: The City of Sacramento has passed a similar ordinance.

**Q: What happens if I don't provide a personal flotation device to my child while at one of these public waterways?**

A: As the responsible adult or guardian, the failure to provide a life preserver for a child thirteen (13) and under is punishable as a misdemeanor and the maximum penalty would be a fine of \$500 or six months in jail.

**Q: What if I can't afford a life preserver for my children?**

A: If you want to keep your children safe at the river, but you can't afford a life preserver, there are several options for you to borrow a life preserver for the day. The county maintains the "**Kids Don't Float**" life preserver loan program. This program has life preservers on loan at several river access points along the American River: **Howe Avenue, Watt Avenue, Ancil Hoffman Park, River Bend Park, two sites within Discovery Park, Negro Bar, Folsom Point, Nimbus** and **Sunrise**. Visit the County Regional Parks site at [www.sacparks.net](http://www.sacparks.net) or call 916-875-6961 for more information about this program.

**California State Parks Division of Boating and Waterways** has partnered with local fire stations to provide life jackets on a loan basis. For a complete listing of life jacket loan stations and to learn more about this program, visit [http://dbw.ca.gov/?page\\_id=29179](http://dbw.ca.gov/?page_id=29179) or call Division of Boating and Waterways at 1-888-326-2822.

**Q: This is a popular swimming beach and the water looks shallow. It looks safe to me. Do I really need to put a life preserver on my child?**

A: Yes. River water is often very cold and can move quickly. A child could get in water too deep very quickly and not be able to swim out. Also, just because there are a lot of people in the area doesn't mean that they may spot your child in trouble. All too often, drownings and near drownings occur before the child have the opportunity to yell or otherwise signal for help. It is important to stay on the safe side. Never take the river for granted, even if it looks safe to you.

**Q: What is a personal flotation device?**

A: Essentially a personal flotation device (life jacket) is certified by the federal government. The personal flotation device must be Coast Guard approved, in good and serviceable condition, and the appropriate size for the wearer.

**Q: How do I make sure I select a personal flotation device that is safe (Coast Guard Approved)?**

A: An approved life preserver will carry a serial number and approval stamp from the U.C. Coast Guard. It will carry a designation for a Type I, II, or III designation.

**Q: Do I need to take care of my life preserver?**

A: While a life preserver will eventually wear out over time, if you take care of your preserver, it can help extend its usefulness. Here are a few behaviors to avoid when caring for your life preserver:

- Don't stack heavy items on your life preserver. It will crush the buoyancy of the preserver
- Make sure your life preserver is completely dry before you stow it
- Don't leave your life preserver outside in your backyard or on your boat in the elements
- Make sure you follow the directions for washing your life preserver on the label
- Don't alter the straps on your life preserver

**Q: What kind of life preserver should my children wear?**

A: It is extremely important that your child's life preserver fits properly or it may slip off, particularly if the child is panicking. It is recommended that children who cannot swim wear a Type I or Type II preserver (Coast Guard Designation). The Type III preserver is the standard size for an adult.

**Q: How can I tell if a life preserver is too large for my children?**

The proper life preserver size is based on the child's weight and chest size. Make sure the life preserver fits snugly on the chest and that the straps are tight. You should then test the fit of the preserver on the child by lifting the life preserver by the shoulder and try to pull it off the child over their head without undoing the straps. If the life preserver can slip over their chin and ears even while fully tightened, the life preserver can be ineffective because your child could slip right through the vest if they jump into the water or fall from a boat.

**Q: Aren't life preservers already required on boats?**

A: Yes. California law says that children under the age of 12 **MUST** wear a Coast Guard approved life preserver while underway on a boat under 26 feet in length, when they are on a personal watercraft device, and if they are being towed behind a vessel. This new ordinance extends this state law to cover children in the waterways in county parks, not just the children on boats.

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