

Life Jacket Performance Level

John Collins, USCGAUX Sector Boston ADSO-PE

In January 2025, the Coast Guard adopted a new system that replaces the “Type I-V” system with a “Performance Level” based on a life jacket’s buoyancy in Newtons. This brings the Coast Guard in line with the International Standards Organization (ISO).

A Newton is a force that is equivalent to about 0.1 kg of weight or 0.2225 pounds. You should use a life jacket with at least ten percent of your weight in flotation. Below is a comparison from NauticEd.

Lifejackets Comparison Chart

Updated January 2025

LEVEL	BUOYANCY (Newtons)	BUOYANCY	BEST USE	TURNS UNCONSCIOUS WEARER FACE-UP?	COUNTS AS INVENTORY WITHOUT WEARING?
50	50N	11 lbs 5 kg 50 Newtons	Calm, sheltered waters; good swimmers; quick rescue. Used for kayaks, skiing, paddle boarding. Not for general boating use.	✗	No, must be worn during activity. Does not count for a boat period!
70	70N	15.7 lbs 7.1 kg 70 Newtons	Inland or nearshore waters; general boating; quick rescue likely.	✗	Yes, if readily accessible.
100	100N	22 lbs 10 kg 100 Newtons	Coastal or offshore waters; may turn some unconscious wearers face-up.	Some	No, inflatable models must be worn; foam models count if accessible.
150	150N	33 lbs 15 kg 150 Newtons	Offshore waters; rough seas; likely to turn unconscious wearers face-up.	✓	No, inflatable models must be worn; foam models count if accessible.
275	275N	61 lbs 27 kg 275 Newtons	Extreme offshore; heavy gear; industrial use; maximum buoyancy.	✓	Yes, inflatables and foam models count if accessible.