

AirForce® by Mustang Inflatable PFDs

Commonly Asked Questions & Answers

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With the advent of Coast Guard approvals on inflatable PFDs, boaters finally have an option to wear a comfortable, unobtrusive flotation device. We have received a tremendous number of inquiries and questions about inflatable products covering topics from how to purchase the right product to how they should be maintained. We thought it might be helpful to put some of these most commonly asked questions down on paper to help people understand this new type of life saving equipment. We hope they can help.

MUSTANG SURVIVAL



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GENERAL

What is an inflatable PFD?

While traditional PFDs use inherently buoyant material such as foam, air-only inflatable PFDs like AirForce® by Mustang, rely entirely upon inflating an internal cell for buoyancy. Uninflated, inflatable PFDs are a comfortable, slim collar or are worn in an unobtrusive belt pack. They can be inflated at any time either by blowing it up orally, or with a CO₂ gas cylinder, while some models also offer an automatic or "hands-free" inflation option. Inflatable PFDs are designed to meet the demands of a full protection lifejacket offering maximum mobility with minimum bulk.

Are all inflatable PFDs approved by the Coast Guard?

Manufacturers of PFDs are required to meet Underwriters Laboratories' (UL) 1180 Standard requirements. PFDs are subject to testing under this Standard and only those that comply receive approval. Approval status is noted on PFD product's label by the presence of UL logo, as well as the presence of Coast Guard approval and approval number.

OPERATIONAL ISSUES

What is the difference between an automatic and manual inflation PFD?

An automatic inflation system has a capsule on the inflation mechanism that will automatically inflate the device within seconds of being immersed in water. A manual inflation system inflates by pulling down sharply on the 'Jerk to Inflate' tab on the bottom of the device. An automatic device can also be inflated manually and all inflatables can be inflated at any time by blowing into the oral tube.

Will an automatic device inflate in the rain?

Not all automatic models use the same automatic inflator. AirForce® by Mustang automatic inflation PFDs are designed so that they have to be immersed in water before the inflation mechanism can be set off. The device is, however, susceptible to accidental inflation if repeatedly exposed to a humid or damp environment.

How do you deflate the device?

To deflate an inflatable, insert the cap of the oral hose upside down and squeeze until all of the air has been expelled.

Why is there an age restriction on the product?

Inflatable PFDs put a responsibility on the wearer of the device to know what to expect and how to operate it in an emergency situation. Children under 16 years may panic and not be prepared to respond appropriately.

Can you use an inflatable PFD more than once?

Yes. Once the device has been used, the CO₂ cylinder and automatic capsule (on automatic inflating devices only) are easily replaced by following the instructions in the Owner's Manual.

FEATURES

Is it possible to convert a manual model to an automatic model?

No. You can, however, convert an automatic model to a manual inflation model by unscrewing the automatic capsule at the bottom of the inflating mechanism. The device will then operate as a manual inflation system.

What are some of the features I need to look for to provide the most safety?

Safety features to look for include reflective tape, whistles, and the amount of freeboard and buoyancy a product will provide.

What should I look for when purchasing an inflatable PFD?

From the outside many inflatable PFDs look very similar. When selecting a product, first ensure that the product offers enough buoyancy for your intended use. Then, it is important to try it on and ensure that it is comfortable - each will have a different feel and fit around the neck. Then, deflate it and try to repack it. You will find some simpler than others. Also, as mentioned previously, look at the additional safety features each product has to offer.

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Why buy a traditional PFD when an inflatable is so comfortable?

It is true that most people find inflatable PFDs appealing for their low profile design. It is also true that, depending on the model, they can turn a person face-up in the water where a traditional PFD might not. What inflatable PFDs do not provide is any thermal or hypothermia protection. Depending on the likelihood of cold water exposure, a constant wear buoyant bomber jacket, coat, or suit could be a safer choice as it would provide thermal or hypothermia protection.

DONNING AND USE

Collar style inflatable PFDs

Collar or yoke style inflatables are donned prior to inflation and are designed to be constant wear devices. They are comfortable, unobtrusive, and do not require any other donning to be deployed properly.

Yoke style inflatables are put on like regular vests and tightened snugly for comfort and to ensure optimum use.

Pouch style inflatable PFDs

Pouch or belt pack style inflatables require what is termed "secondary" donning for proper deployment and use. They can be deployed in one of two ways.

1. Remove the inflatable bladder from the belt pack, put it over your head, adjust accordingly, and inflate.
2. Inflate the bladder while still packed in the pouch by pulling the "Jerk to Inflate" tab. The bladder will come out of the belt pack inflated, after which you put the bladder over your head and adjust accordingly.

BUOYANCY

What is buoyancy and why do I need 35 lbs of buoyancy when I weigh 150 lbs?

The buoyant force of a PFD is defined as the amount of force or effort required to hold the jacket under water. To put it into relative terms, a standard PFD requires a minimum buoyancy of 15.5 lbs. The 35 lbs of buoyancy found in an AirForce® by Mustang inflatable PFD is the same amount found in the traditional bulky horseshoe shaped lifejackets (Type I in the U.S.). This is more than enough buoyancy to keep an adult afloat in a face-up position.

What is the difference between a 22 lb and 35 lb model?

There are two significant differences between a 22 lb and 35 lb inflatable PFD. First, the 35 lb model will hold your head higher out of the water offering a greater freeboard. This is particularly important if you ever find yourself immersed in turbulent water. The second difference is that 35 lb devices are designed to self-right most people, where a 22 lb device will generally not turn someone face-up.

What is freeboard?

Freeboard is the distance from the surface of the water to the bottom of a person's mouth or the lowest point where water can enter their mouth. It is this distance that helps evaluate the in-water performance of a product. The amount of freeboard a product offers is directly related to a combination of both the design and the amount of buoyancy in the product. A product offering a higher level of freeboard will offer greater protection in waves or rough water.

MAINTENANCE

How often do I change the capsule on the automatic model?

Different manufacturers use different automatic inflation devices on their PFD. Refer to the manufacturer's product and attached User Manual for maintenance instructions.

Can I use any CO₂ cylinder to re-arm the product?

No. CO₂ cylinders come in a variety of sizes and contain varying amounts of CO₂ gas. Read the labels on the product and refer to the Owner's Manual to ensure your replacement CO₂ cylinder is compatible with your device.

How often and what kind of maintenance is required?

Every 3 months an inflatable PFD should be inspected in accordance with the product's Owner's Manual and maintenance instructions. Typically, this would include a visual inspection of the components and workmanship, checking that the device is properly armed, and testing of the oral hose and inflatable cell for leakage or holes.

How do I test the inflatable cell for leaks?

Every 3 months an inflatable PFD should be inflated until firm by blowing it up orally. Leave the device overnight and inspect it the next day. A leaking PFD will not hold its firmness and should be replaced.

How often should I replace the unused CO₂ cylinder?

Technically, a CO₂ cylinder has no predetermined shelf life. During regular maintenance, check the cylinder for any rust. If rusting is apparent, replace the cylinder. It is very unlikely that this would occur, but should be routinely checked for.

REGULAR USE

Can I leave it on my boat?

Yes, an inflatable PFD can be stowed on a boat as long as it is stored in a warm dry place. Although a damper environment will not affect a manually inflating device, it will affect a device with automatic backup. The automatic mechanism can fire inadvertently if continually stored in damp conditions, or exposed to high humidity.

What sports can I use it for?

Inflatable PFDs are not recommended for personal watercrafting or any white water activities where you are constantly immersed in water as the device will only provide flotation protection once activated. For these activities, it is recommended that you have flotation protection at all times.