Why should I wear a PFD when I'm crab fishing?

Above: Flotation Coat, Mustang Survival

Crab fishing on the West Coast is more deadly than crab fishing in the Bering Sea. Small vessels, rough seas, and treacherous bar crossings can result in sudden capsizings or man-overboard events with little or no response time to put on a PFD.

Wearing a PFD provides you with a much greater chance of survival in the event of an accident!

But many crab fishermen say, "PFDs are uncomfortable and difficult to work in…"

For example, in a recent survey in Newport, Oregon, crab fishermen reported that the impact on comfort and the ability to work were the primary reasons PFDs were not routinely worn.

There ***are*** PFDs available that are comfortable and easy to work in.

Manufacturers are currently designing lower profile PFD styles that are more comfortable and less restrictive. There are three basic types available:

- ***Inherently buoyant, vest style PFDs.*** The common vest type III PFD has been redesigned to eliminate flotation around the upper chest and shoulders, making it easier to work in.
- ***Inflatable, vest style PFDs.*** These PFDs have an even lower profile and can be manually activated and most are activated when they hit the water.
- ***Gear integrated PFDs.*** Some PFDs integrate flotation into work gear, such as bibs with foam flotation in the chest, inflatable suspenders, and jackets with foam.

CRAB FISHING SAFETY STUDY
NIOSH OHSU UW

Photos: Gerry Croteau, Ted Teske

Which is the best PFD for me?

Trials conducted in Alaska and Oregon fisheries found that fishermen had various opinions about PFDs. Personal preference was an important factor. The chart below indicates the types of PFDs tested, their advantages, disadvantages, manufacturers, and costs.

"The best PFD is the one you wear!"

INHERENTLY BUOYANT VEST	INFLATABLE VEST	GEAR INTEGRATED PFDs	GEAR INTEGRATED PFDs (INFLATABLE)
Advantages Inherently buoyant Inexpensive	Lowest profile Most comfortable	Worn when gear is worn Inherently buoyant	Worn when gear is worn Relatively low profile
Disadvantages Bulkiest of all types	Not inherently buoyant Manual pull tabs can snag on gear	May be uncomfortable for some individuals	Not inherently buoyant
What Fishermen Say "Was the most comfortable PFD I have ever worn."	"Very nice product. I will use it as often as I can."	"I like it. The idea is a good one."	"This is a good PFD. Easy and quick to don."
Some Manufacturers Mustang, Stearns	Guy Cotten, Mustang, Stearns, Stormy Seas	Guy Cotten, Mustang, Regatta, Stearns	Guy Cotten, Stormy Seas
Cost $50–$100	$120–$300	$150–$300	$100–$300

What are the advantages of the inherently buoyant PFD?

An inherently buoyant PFD always floats! And, it doesn't require regular inspection and maintenence.

When should I wear a PFD?

Ideally, PFDs should be worn anytime at sea. But PFDs should always be worn when you are: crossing river bars, fishing near shore or in rough seas, alone on deck, and in poor visibility conditions, such as nighttime and heavy fog. Develop a policy for wearing PFDs on your vessel!

Where can I get one of these PFDs?

Check your local marine supply store. If you cannot find the PFD you are looking for, contact one of the manufacturers above to find a local vendor or an online source.

For more information on the Crab Fishing Safety Study and PFDs, contact Gerry Croteau at the University of Washington, 206-616-1907.