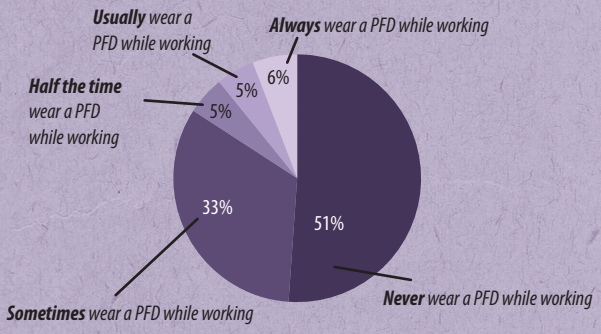
PFDs That Work

DUNGENESS CRABBERS

Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) prevent fisherman deaths, yet many fisherman don't wear them. To identify more wearable PDFs, researchers asked 50 West Coast Dungeness crab fishermen to rate the comfort and acceptability of a PDF after wearing it for 30 days. This document shows which PFDs were preferred by Dungeness crabbers.

PFD Use Among Dungeness Crabbers:



More than three out of five Dungeness crab fishermen have personally known other crabbers that have been on a boat that capsized.

Dungeness Crabbers' Responses to Survey:

- More than half of Dungeness crab fishermen **never** wear a PFD while working on deck or crossing a river bar
- 20% of crabbers surveyed had fallen overboard
- Primary factors for not wearing a PFD include lack of comfort, potential for gear entanglement, and interfering with movement

PFD Evaluation:

After 30 days of wearing and evaluating five different PFDs, Dungeness crabbers preferred the Mustang inflatable vest and the Stearns foam vest. Comments on these devices include:

- Comfortable to wear
- Lightweight and low profile
- Did not rub or chafe

Mustang Inflatable Work Vest
(MD3188)

"I really liked it [the Mustang Work Vest] a lot. It was easy to use and wear."

–Study Participant

"It [the Stearns foam vest] was the most comfortable PFD I have ever worn.

– Study Participant

Stearns Foam Work Vest
(I424)

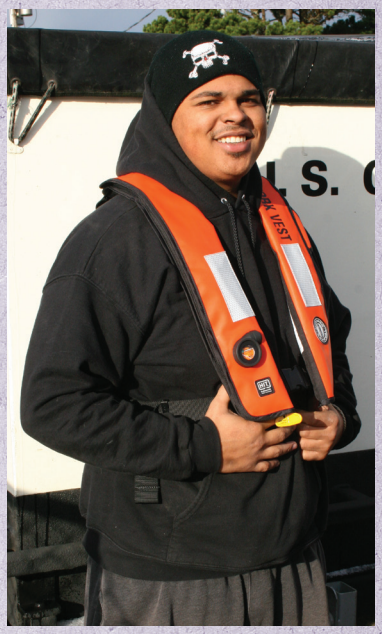
Background on PFD Study in the West Coast Dungeness Fishery

The West Coast Dungeness crab fishery is one of most dangerous fisheries in the U.S. During 2000-2013, 33 crab fishermen drowned. None were wearing PFDs at the time of the incidents. Those deaths might have been prevented if the fishermen had been wearing PFDs.

Researchers with Oregon Health Science University, University of Washington, and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health conducted an evaluation with West Coast Dungeness crab fishermen to rate the comfort and acceptability of five personal flotation devices (PFDs). Marine safety experts learned that some of the most common objections to wearing a PFD are that they are bulky, heavy, uncomfortable, and put the fisherman at risk of entanglement. Fishermen have also expressed concerns that PFDs could snag on fishing gear. After a 30-day evaluation of PFDs on board Dungeness crabbing vessels, these objections were addressed through selecting the proper PFDs.[1]

Recommendations for all Fishermen

There are many models and styles of PFDs available today that are designed for commercial fishing and preferred by Dungeness crabbers. When choosing a PFD try on a variety of styles and models to find the one that works best for the type of work to be done.



The **best** PFD is the one that is worn on deck!

All vessel operators should have a PFD policy for their crew.

Examples of PFD polices include:

- PFDs must be worn 100% of the time on deck
- PFDs must be worn when crossing a river bar
- PFDs must be worn when the weather turns bad

Whatever your policy is, write it down, post it, make the crew aware of it, and enforce it.

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[1]For a full report describing the study and its results, please refer to the following website: http://deohs.washington.edu/FRCG/project/crabpfd. Project funded through the Pacific Northwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center (NIOSH/CDC Award 2 U50 OH007544).

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